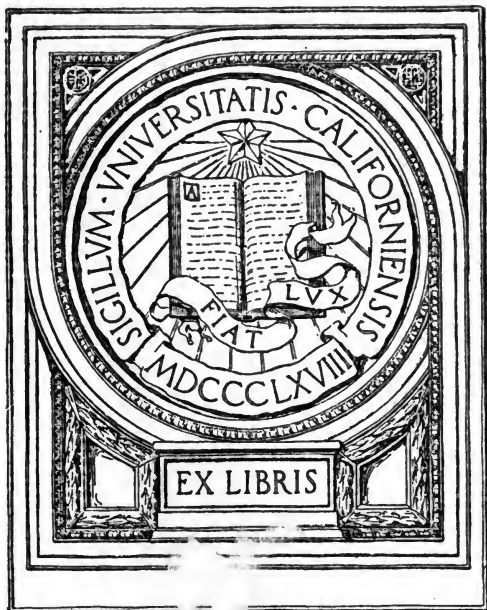


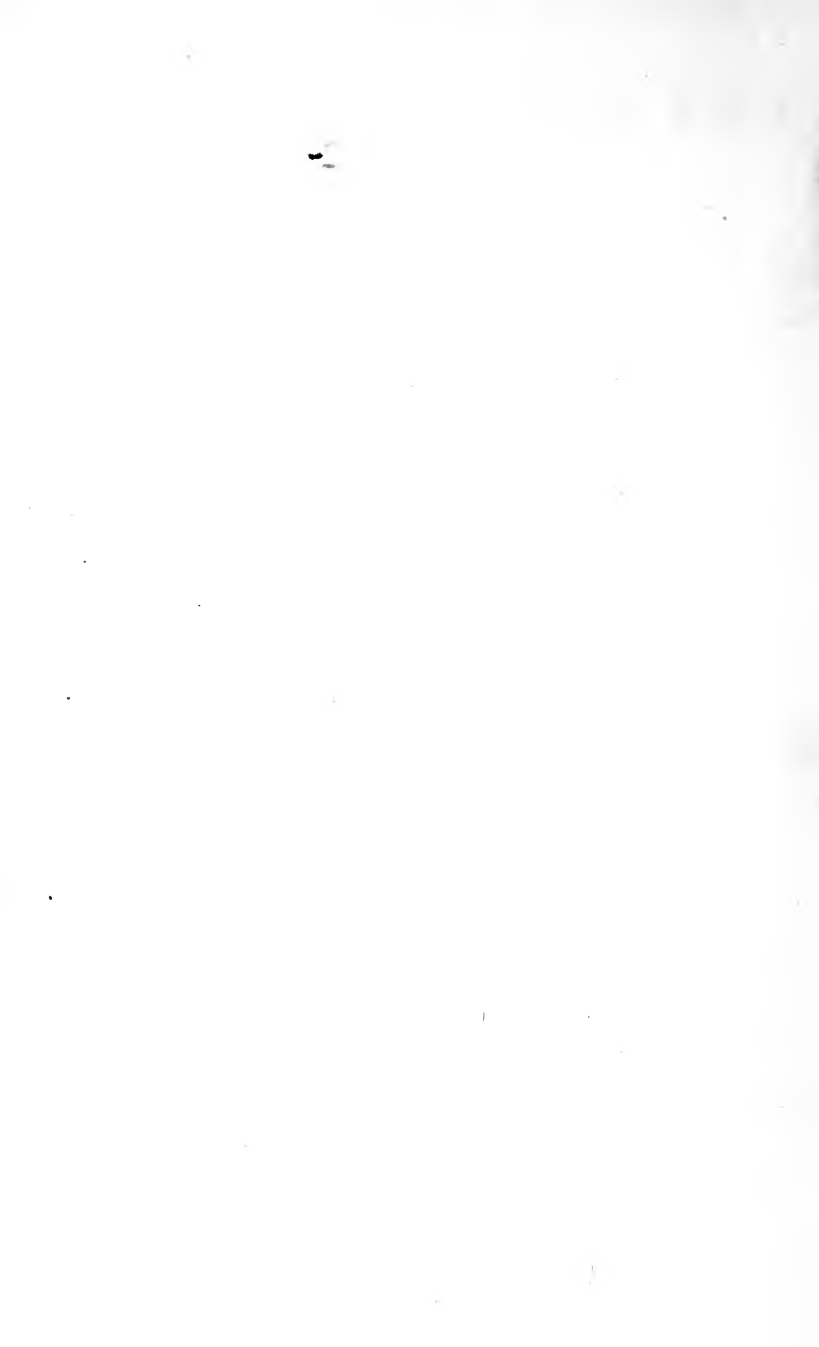
Breath of Life
A Story of Youth
By Arthur Tuckerman

GIFT OF
M. G. Luck



961
T896
b

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation



BREATH OF LIFE

A STORY OF YOUTH

BY

ARTHUR TUCKERMAN



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press

1922

GIFT OF M. G. LUCK

Copyright, 1922

by

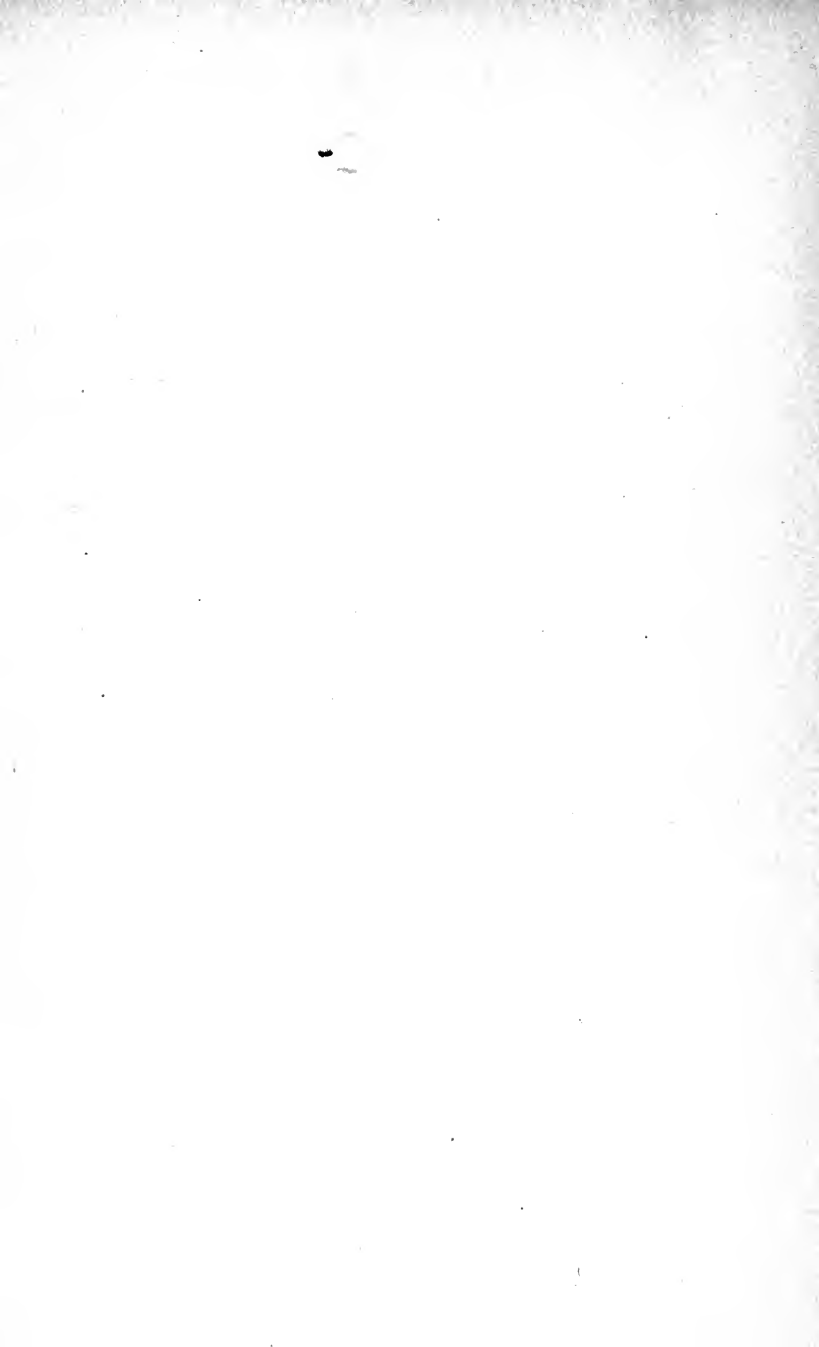
Arthur Tuckerman

Made in the United States of America



To F. T.

M41886



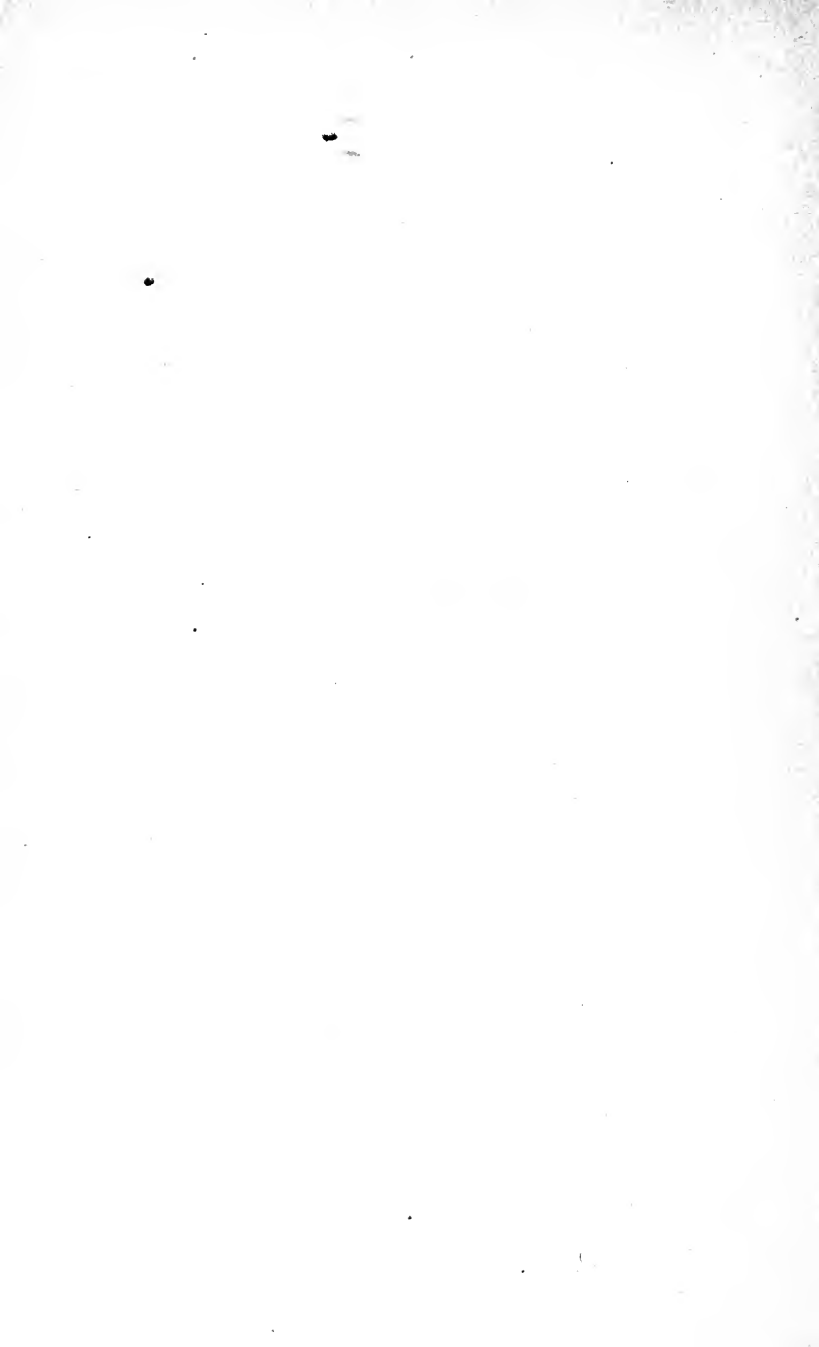
. . . Ἴσχυς καὶ εὐμορφία νεότητος γήραος δὲ σωφροσύνη ἀνθος

. . . The pride of youth is in strength and
beauty, the pride of old age in discretion.

DEMOCRITUS, *Ethica*.



Book I



Breath of Life

CHAPTER I

I

THE hands of the illuminated dial upon Grand Central indicated the hour of seven. A taxi driver sheered off skilfully from the drifting pandemonium of Forty-Second Street, and sought the comparative calm of Vanderbilt Avenue; his alert eyes picked out, presently, a prospective customer—a young man, standing irresolutely upon the curb opposite the plate-glass exit doors of the station, two battered and bulging suitcases at his feet. His large, loosely-knit frame was enveloped in a shapeless overcoat of raccoon fur; his hat, of soft brown felt, was worn, with its crown carefully flattened, well forward over his brow. The oblique rays of a nearby arclight fell upon him, revealing ruddy, pleasantly-rounded features. He stood motionless, hands thrust deep in the pockets of his coat, regarding the hurrying crowds with lazy, half-humorous eyes, the humor in them somewhat tempered by a certain truculence of the lower lip;

his expression was, one would say, that of a privileged being, tolerantly and good-naturedly contemptuous of the surrounding throng.

A stout little drummer, staggering under the burden of two glazy sample cases, hailed the taxi frantically; but the driver—who was a snob at heart—ignored him, and drew up before the young man who bore so unmistakably the collegiate stamp.

II

Everett had not as yet seen the new house to which the Gails had moved about the first of December. Indeed, entirely forgetful of the hurried note his mother had sent to New Haven concerning the family's change of residence, he directed the taxi driver to the old house in lower Park Avenue, scarcely six blocks from the station. There the barred and closely shuttered windows, and the "For Sale" sign which confronted him in the dim light of the corner street lamp acted as an abrupt reminder of her letter. He recalled the new address in the "eighties," told it to the driver, and settled back in the cab with a vague but pleasurable sense of anticipation; the new house was an innovation—and to Everett Gail innovation was the spice of life. From his pocket he drew an oblong case of chased gold and extracted a cheap and peculiarly pungent cigarette.

It was a Saturday night. Up and down Fifth

Avenue parallel streams of living, throbbing light were moving and halting in mechanical obedience to the traffic signals, spheres of light whose rich, pellucid colors reminded him obscurely of glasses filled with liqueur—the amber of Benedictine, the deep red of Cherry Brandy, the green richness of Crème de Menthe. . . .

Beyond the Plaza, white and enchanting, ablaze with parallelograms of yellow light, the traffic thinned. A sudden sense of exultation filled him during the smooth, noiseless ride up the wide gray stretch of asphalt; marble façades of houses steeped in blue moonlight; Central Park, on his left, a fretwork of branches glimmering, ghostly and motionless, in a thin covering of snow. New York was, it occurred to him, growing more beautiful every year—or was it because he was beginning to have an æsthetic sense? . . . He chuckled aloud at the absurdity of the thought. Nevertheless, he was impressed; it all seemed so big, tremendous, inviting . . . room for the whole world, he thought.

He was roused from his reveries by the stopping of the cab, soon after it had turned abruptly into a side street. He climbed out, deposited his suitcases on the sidewalk, and added to the fare a tip appropriate to his exultant mood. Then, as the cab rolled away, he turned round to face the house.

Momentarily the size of it staggered him. It towered, virgin white and tremendous, into the

purple night sky where its outline became lost in a confused maze of cupolas and towers; it was, he thought whimsically, a very new and blatant edition of a French château—or, rather, half a château, since one end of it was abruptly chopped off to accommodate the gray, shapeless bulk of an adjacent apartment house.

He picked up his suitcases and stumbled across the sidewalk to an immense door, an ornate, complicated affair of plate glass and wrought iron embellished with a gilded design of *fleurs-de-lys*; behind the glass he could discern heavy curtains of crimson velours, tightly drawn. He groped ineffectually for the bell button and, after several seconds, found it, an insignificant thing of mother-of-pearl.

The door was opened, presently, by an impressive, solemn-looking individual in evening clothes, a bald dignitary who wore mutton-chop whiskers and had tiny blue veins intricately patterned upon his hectic cheeks, like so many railway lines traced upon a map. Everett felt, suddenly, that no one had ever before eyed him with quite such patent suspicion and disapproval.

"I'm Everett Gail," he ventured nervously, under the cool scrutiny of watery blue eyes.

The solemn one inclined his head gravely, almost imperceptibly.

"Mr. and Mrs. Gail were expecting you before now," he announced. "They are out to dinner at

present. I have been instructed, however, to show you to your room."

He proceeded to lead the way up a curving staircase of frigid marble. The walls of grayish stone were hung at intervals with tapestry and ancient banners. By the time they reached the second floor Everett found himself secretly longing for the sight of carpets—and wallpaper. He had never seen, he thought, so many tall candlesticks in his life, candles which shed an eerie, flickering light upon the groined ceilings of archways that led to damp, cheerless passages of stone. He was irresistibly reminded of certain phrases in a recent historical lecture he had heard at New Haven; of marble basilicas, and the austere beauty of shadowed transepts. . . .

At the third floor landing Emily met him and deposited an effusive kiss on each cheek. Dressed as she was in pastel gray, with the soft candle light gleaming on her bobbed russet hair, Everett was suddenly aware that his sister had grown extremely pretty.

She followed him into his room, a formal apartment of brocaded walls and spidery, fragile furniture, and sat down casually on the edge of the bed.

"Well, Evvy," she began. "How do you like it?"

"Like what?" He was trying to find a place where he could hang his coat.

"The house—silly."

He glanced about the room with a palpable effort at appreciation.

"The room's all right, I suppose. But the rest of the house—it's about as hilarious as Grant's Tomb."

"Oh, Evvy—and Father's spent so much on it!"

He frowned, hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"There's nothing very new about it. The Days, the Belknaps, the Crofts—they all live in houses like this. Father might at least have been original when he had the chance. Now if he'd built a Pagoda, or a Japanese house on sticks——"

"You're getting *so* clever, Evvy," Emily said, with a trace of her familiar sisterly sarcasm.

He bundled her cheerfully out of the room after that; then proceeded to dress for dinner. It occurred to him, in the midst of brushing his hair, that his father must have made a great deal of money during the past few years—exactly how much he did not hazard a guess. Everett rarely bothered his head about such remote problems.

III

In the dining room, which was in the sombre half-light of a dozen blood red candles of spiralled wax, he joined Emily—and a man. That they had not waited for him nettled him considerably, and he took his place at the table frowning. Unconsciously, in the past few months he had surrounded

himself with a certain halo of self-esteem, based perhaps upon his own unexpected prowess in college athletics; and, somehow, he felt that his homecoming was not in keeping with his importance—indeed, so far, it had been an extremely uncereemonious welcome, he thought. He was introduced to Emily's companion, whose name was Hal Jones, and promptly took a violent prejudice to him. The man was insipid-looking, had velvet lapels to his evening dress, and wore a motley collection of trinkets upon his watch chain. Pretty soon, Everett felt sure, he would begin to recount the history of these trophies—if he had not already done so.

Dinner proved to be a grave affair. Two burnished candlesticks framed Emily's delicate beauty at the head of the table. He came to the conclusion, for the second time that evening, that her charm was undeniable. He couldn't quite reconcile himself to this fact—Emily growing up, becoming attractive to men. . . . There passed through his mind a momentary vision of her at fourteen, a harum-scarum thing in a rose-colored gingham dress, all legs and arms, climbing a tree back of their old house at Stockbridge; tearing at a green apple with predatory teeth. . . .

"You've blossomed out considerably since I last saw you, Emmy," he told her earnestly.

"Yes. Isn't she adorable," interposed the Jones man.

Everett merely glared at him.

Emily asked, nervously:

"How's New Haven, Evvy?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"O. K.—but I'm giving up school. Forgot I hadn't told you; I'm going into business after the holidays. It's really the only thing to do, these days. There's no use wasting another year on a bunch of subjects I could never pass—Spanish and French were the only things I had the ghost of a chance at. I'm starting in with Piggy Trehearn on January first."

Emily gasped.

"Good gracious! Have you told Father yet?"

"He won't care," Everett answered, without conviction but to satisfy himself—and also because there was a stranger present.

"Have you seen 'Afghan'?" interposed Jones suddenly, apropos of nothing; and leaned ingratiatingly toward Emily. "Pretty rough, some of it—but darn clever. There's an Egyptian dancer in the second act——"

Everett, who had seen the play, said loudly that it was rotten, and saw triumphantly that he had reduced Jones to silence. After that no one spoke for a while, until Jones looked at his watch and attempted the time-worn and fatuous remark about the "twenty minutes after the hour silence." Brixton brought in toast with the whitebait, crisp dry toast, and it seemed to Everett that he was making

a fiendish noise as he crunched it; his ears began to tingle. . . .

After dinner he managed to draw Emily aside for a moment when Jones had strolled out into the hall.

"Where did you rake up that snake?" he asked.

She gave him what she used to call her "most freezing look."

"Everett, what's the matter with you? You're so crude—I think he's very nice, personally. He's dancing in the League play with me."

"Oh, is he? Well, I'll bet he makes a hit if he goes as a girl."

She drew away from him, sharply.

"I think you'd better go right to bed, and see if you can sleep yourself into a pleasanter frame of mind. Hal Jones and I are going to a dance."

"How did he happen to be dining alone with you?" Everett insisted.

She put a finger to her lips.

"Shh!—We were going out to dine, but we decided to stay in when we heard you arriving; Mother doesn't know about it of course; she's as strict as ever—please keep still."

He frowned, crossed to the sideboard and lighted one of his father's large Havanas; it seemed to give him a certain confidence.

"So that's how it is? Well—I'll have to think about it. Only I don't like this fellow; wish you'd drop him——"

"Evvy," she began sweetly. "Don't forget that I know how the Packard got smashed on Merrick Road last summer——"

She whirled away, laughing triumphantly. Speechless he found his way to the library, where he slumped into a leather armchair and surrendered himself to a state of brooding gloom. Things had changed considerably during his absence—changed for the worse. Emily was completely beyond his control now, he concluded. This homecoming wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

CHAPTER II

I

FROM Michael Gail of Yorkshire and his wife, who stepped ashore at New York in the year 1780, there sprang a line of respectable, law-abiding citizens, members of the Episcopal Church, staunch Whigs—later on, equally staunch Republicans. Not a man of them took an active part in politics, or came prominently before the public eye in any capacity; this, perhaps, because of an inherent dread of notoriety. Years later, when the fourth generation of American-born Gails realized that their beloved city was gradually becoming the political prey of alien freebooters they contented themselves, like the majority of their class and kind, with occasional and feeble protests in the correspondence column of a certain ultra-respectable Republican newspaper.

John Gail, father of Everett, was, in fact, a member of the minority elect of Manhattan, clinging steadfastly to the illusion that his element still formed the representative citizenship of the metropolis. Actually, he wielded less influence, politically

and otherwise, than one Pete Halloran, who ran the garage wherein he kept his limousine three blocks away, a man who could perform miracles by a whispered word to a certain Police Commissioner, and whose son did a mysterious and intricate business in stolen motor cars and raw whisky. . . . Were John Gail to die today, his obituary notice would politely state that he had been a member of four well-known clubs; that he had been a lawyer of some prominence, and noted for his work in charitable causes; that he had married Miss Jessie Taylor of Baltimore in 1896, and left two sons and one daughter.

Gail senior was lanky, lean and colorless, a quiet, unobtrusive man who loved his family with an intense devotion which he rarely put into words. He was, quite naturally, proud of his younger son Stoddard who, at the age of nineteen, evinced a remarkable ability for architecture, but he secretly preferred the company of Everett. The freshness, the kaleidoscopic changing of his elder son's views on every conceivable subject amused and interested him to a degree which Stoddard's sober, studious habits had never done; and yet, at times, he was worried by Everett's eternal restlessness.

The family rarely saw John Gail between nine in the morning and six in the evening, except on Sundays when he invariably donned his silk hat and cutaway to attend the service at Grace Church. As in most other matters he was strictly conven-

tional concerning his religion, and it was somewhat of a shock to him when he discovered Everett lying abed Sunday mornings reading the sporting sections of a metropolitan newspaper; however he made no protest, because the whole of his life was based on the principle of live and let live. . . . Nevertheless, on certain occasions he could be discovered sitting alone in his vast, oaken library, staring in a pathetic sort of way at Everett's photograph upon his desk, and wishing fervently that he might better understand this son of his. . . .

His wife was a thin, faded little woman with an incredible amount of latent energy which she managed to divide in a wholly admirable way between her children and a dozen charity committees. She was rarely known to express views on any subject, and when she did they were somewhat banal; she was intensely interested in details that concerned the running of her house—servants, food, the bringing up of the children. Indeed, she was so silently efficient in these matters that the rest of the family took her ability as a matter of course, and never quite appreciated her.

Emily grew up to be a mental counterpart of her mother, and they seemed to understand each other implicitly; as a child she was well-behaved, caused little or no trouble. Stoddard was ever silent, pondering—immersed in books from the day he learned to read. That Stoddard would amount to something was a foregone conclusion. Everett,

on the other hand, was from his infancy prone to act strangely, to indulge in periodic orgies of amusement during which he would listen to no one; he was always more or less of a source of worry—or, at best, speculation.

At times he would give utterance to startling views which set his parents to wondering where he obtained them. Upon his fifth birthday an uncle presented him with a five dollar gold piece; young Everett passed two sleepless nights worrying as to how he could best spend his wealth, then hurled it from his nursery window. He sought his mother, beaming.

"It worried me so much," he lisped gravely, "that I throwed it away. I'd much rather be poor and not worry."

His father vowed angrily that the child was crazy, but his mother, at the time, entertained vague hopes of his developing into a philosopher.

Again, at the age of ten, when the Gails were at their Stockbridge farm, he boarded a freight locomotive, hid himself amidst the coal in the tender, and travelled to Stamford. He returned to his home two days later, tired, filthy, but triumphant.

"Now that I've run away and been on a locomotive," he told his weeping mother, "I don't ever have to do it again—so let's all be happy."

When he was seventeen he became temporarily convinced that the salvation of the world lay in

Socialism, and had a violent quarrel with his father on the subject. It made him feel immensely grown-up when he discovered that he could argue well enough to make his father angry.

Thus he grew up; restless, eager, his mind ever alert for something new.

II

In the year nineteen hundred and nineteen the Gails' position in New York underwent a change. A shrewd investment of John's in certain wartime products brought him a delayed and unexpected fortune. A few months later the family moved from their stolid, comfortable old house in the lower Park Avenue to the château in the east "eighties"; John Gail, removed from the worries of a desultory law practice, found that his name was spoken in Wall Street. Although both he and his wife were completely free from social aspirations—simply because they had from birth felt secure in this respect—they had substantial ambitions for their offspring. Emily presented no difficulty whatever; she was sent to a fashionable school which turned out girls like Fords, from which she emerged triumphant, dazzling, pretty—a perfect, but standardized product. She bobbed her hair when her friends bobbed theirs, took part in the contemporary mania for squirrel coats, gray silk stockings, and suede shoes. She was sent to Europe

for three months with a chaperon, during which she visited Versailles and the Tower of London, and spent the rest of her time dancing at various Paris restaurants with American boys she had known at home. In New York she went to all the parties that were "worth going to," and invariably had at least four freshmen at her supper table.

That she had been successfully launched in a social way became evident by the fact that she began to use her home merely as a convenient place to change her clothes, bathe, and sleep. . . . Her father complained pitifully that he had almost forgotten how she looked. In the mornings her mother would sometimes tiptoe to Emily's bedroom and ask her about the men she had met the night before; so far she showed no signs of becoming interested in less than three men at one time, so that Jessie Gail breathed a sigh of relief, feeling that her daughter was, at least, temporarily safe.

As young Everett grew up it became evident that he would present a more intricate problem than his sister and younger brother. Although he had lived a fairly normal life up to the age of twenty-two—with the exception of a feverish eighteen months, during the War, which he spent in being transferred from one naval radio school to another on the American Continent—he was, perhaps, unconsciously inclined to allow the spirit of

the age in which he lived to play too strongly upon him; and yet in this respect he was but a counterpart of hundreds of his kind—young, restless, craving for new sensations. . . . He knew, and admitted frankly, that in life it was his policy to take the path of least resistance; he had, too, the wholly modern and youthful habit of taking nothing seriously except trivialities.

At the proper age he had expressed a distinct preference for Yale, and had been duly sent there. It was generally but vaguely understood in the family that he was to become a lawyer—for the eminently suitable reason that his father and grandfather had been lawyers before him. His collegiate career—split in the middle by the War—had not been particularly vicious, or particularly virtuous; his work had been what the bespectacled supervisors of it termed “creditable”—an elastic phrase which seemed, however, to pacify the family. But Everett grew tired of college life, as he grew tired of everything else—long, long before he had even opened the cover of a Blackstone. At the age of twenty-two he became conscious of vast, unguided ambitions stirring within him; he was a human dynamo of power and enthusiasm, needing but a goal to which he might apply his energy. He was at this age, nearly six feet in height, loosely-built, amiably good-looking. A few flappers said that he was “divine,” but he only admitted that married women were really interesting.

Several acquaintances approached him at New Haven, on hearing of his intention to go into business, with widely-varying propositions. The mushroom growth of the Gail fortune was already common knowledge, although Everett himself scarcely realized it. He successfully evaded tempting offers which concerned oil wells, automatic telephones and bullet-proof glass, and eventually succumbed to the glamor of real estate as expounded by one Piggy Trehearn, his roommate, a facile, glib talker. Everett did not know, of course, that Piggy, having his own axes to grind, was counting merely on the inestimable advantage of having a Gail in the offices of Trehearn and Company; it would be well, Piggy thought, to be able to say off-hand to new customers: "Oh, by the way young Everett Gail has just joined us. You know the Gails . . ." All of which he explained in a long letter to Trehearn senior, who approved whole-heartedly.

Accordingly, on the second day of the New Year, he went into the real estate business.

III

Trehearn and Company, being a comparatively new firm, pursued an aggressive yet ingratiating policy that might have been scorned by its well-established and more complacent rivals. Trehearn advertisements, confined to the more fashionable

publications of sport and society, were artistic, and at the same time worded with a certain deliberate snobbishness; Trehearn letters to customers, extremely dignified, were typewritten on large sheets of cream-colored stationery that allowed the widest of margins. Customers were all treated with the greatest deference, yet those who had less than fifteen thousand to squander on a summer rent were subtly allowed to understand that Trehearn's was honoring them by attending to their paltry needs. There were magazines and newspapers to read in the anteroom while one waited to interview a partner—one always waited, since the partners were inevitably engaged in a "conference." Old sporting prints decorated the walls of this room, and it conveyed a general impression of quiet luxury and good taste.

Within the offices, at the rear of the building, there was to be found every imaginable labor-saving device of modern business; dictaphones, mimeographs, noiseless typewriters, automatic letter openers . . . machinery, smooth and glittering, hummed all day in a perpetual, subdued song. Young men, with well-defined waist lines and carnations in their lapels, glided silently from desk to desk distributing memoranda on tinted papers. Everett thought the place had no soul, until one day during the lunch hour he accidentally discovered the junior partner kissing the telephone operator behind the ice water cooler.

It was understood that Everett was to commence work on a commission basis, that he was to get fifty percent of the firm's commission on every transaction for which he was personally responsible. Old Trehearn called him aside and pointed out the inestimable advantage he possessed in what he chose to term "a large social acquaintance."

"Never let opportunity slip by you, my boy," he said, shaking a fat forefinger at Everett. "Business first, last and always. Bashfulness won't get you anywhere; go to it when you see a chance."

Everett tried hard to go to it, but found many idle hours upon his hands; he had been in the office a week when it suddenly dawned upon him that his business was not confined to office hours; that dinner parties, the opera, and dances were all to be regarded as potent fields of opportunity.

He started to work with the greatest possible enthusiasm; took his old Sporting Mercer from the garage, overhauled it, and spent long days trundling about Westchester and Long Island in order to familiarize himself with the property in which Trehearn was interested. Five weeks passed; his energy was praised, but no financial recognition was forthcoming.

Opportunity came at last. One Sunday in February his mother had a friend to luncheon, a Mrs. Jennings Clark, who spoke vaguely of purchasing a house somewhere along the Sound. Before the salad was served Everett had elicited a promise

from her to run out to Greenwich with him on Monday afternoon. Mrs. Gail remained mute during the rest of the luncheon, overcome with mingled pride at her son's business acumen and an obscure feeling of mortification that the subject had been broached at her own dining table.

Mrs. Clark kept her promise. Everett showed her nine houses and eventually convinced her that one of them was exactly what she wanted. Early on Tuesday morning she appeared at Trehearn's and the deal was closed. For half an hour Everett waited outside Trehearn senior's private office, and then breathed a sigh of relief when he saw a stenographer emerge with the signed contracts.

Throughout the afternoon he waited anxiously for a summons from old Trehearn, but no summons came; the next day he did the same—and the next. On Saturday morning, as Trehearn senior was starting out to lunch Everett followed him to the office door.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I'd like to know about my commission—it's my first transaction, you see."

Trehearn paused, hand upon the door knob, gazing at him quizzically.

"You're Everett Gail, aren't you? What commission are you referring to?"

Everett was conscious of his heart thumping as he answered:

"On the Burnham house in Greenwich—Mrs. Jennings Clark bought it."

Trehearn raised his eyebrows, smiling faintly.

"Why, my dear fellow, she's not a new customer. Her name has been on our books for months."

"But I showed her the house," Everett insisted, with a growing sense of the helplessness of his position.

Trehearn shrugged his shoulders; his voice took on a shade of impatience.

"Perhaps you did—but I'm afraid there's been a misunderstanding on your part. As a matter of fact, I myself recommended the Burnham property and showed it to her last autumn. Of course, you understand that we expect you to discover customers on your own initiative for us—Still, under the circumstances, I'm not averse to granting you a commission of—fifteen percent, we'll say, for your trouble in this instance——"

The door closed gently behind him.

During the following week Everett contrived to steer two prospective customers to the office. One of these proved impossible to suit; in the second case it happened, unfortunately, that the whole transaction was managed by the junior partner, since Everett was tramping Jersey clay on an errand stipulated by the senior partner.

He hailed Piggy Trehearn outside the office at five o'clock that evening.

"Look here, Piggy," he began. "I've been with

you seven weeks now; it's all very nice and pleasant to be here—but I haven't earned a dollar, except fifteen percent on the Burnham property when I expected fifty."

Piggy managed to appear both pained and surprised; he rubbed his double chin thoughtfully.

"That is so," he admitted. "It's unfortunate. You just don't make the grade, do you, Evvy?"

Everett laughed mirthlessly, controlling with some difficulty a rising wave of anger.

"Either I've got to be let in on commissions, or be given a salary. I can't go on in this fashion."

"You can't expect fat commissions as an inexperienced beginner," Piggy retorted with surprising asperity, "—however, I'll see the Governor about your case tomorrow. Well, so long. Got to leave now. Girl waiting for me at the Ritz."

Everett, watching him as he climbed hurriedly into a taxi, found himself wondering how he had managed to room with the fellow for five months . . .

The following morning he was put on the office staff at a salary of twenty dollars a week, with the same opportunity of making commissions as before. No one in the office was more surprised than himself; in considering the matter he came to the disillusioning conclusion that, in future, friendship and business relations were not to be confounded.

CHAPTER III

I

EMILY discovered him in his bedroom at eleven o'clock that night, curled up in an armchair reading; he appeared, she thought, somewhat depressed. She stood before him, radiant in a cerise dress of chiffon, silver stockings and silver slippers, and planted a peck of a kiss upon his forehead.

"Come on to Lottie Barlow's party, and cheer up," she said. "She's reminded me a dozen times to bring you—and, for goodness sake, please stop looking like a martyred saint."

He tossed aside his book, yawned, and smiled up at her.

"It looks," he said, "as if I'm going to be a failure at business. I've earned exactly fourteen dollars in seven weeks."

"Nonsense!" she cried, and then, her thoughts wandering off, characteristically, at a tangent: "I suppose it never occurred to you, Evvy, that I've got my business to attend to, also. It begins at eleven nightly and lasts until three or four. This is my second season as a shining light, and each

year the task is going to be a little harder—Oh, yes, I've heard older girls talking about it; I've heard them say that trying to maintain a frenzied grip upon a waning popularity isn't such a joke—especially with the lifelong prospect of being banished to dusty oblivion, or hen bridge parties, and an occasional charity ball——”

“Good Lord!” —He was patently shocked—
“When did you become such a little pessimist?”

“It isn't pessimism,” she answered thoughtfully. “It's just—facing facts. Two years to make yourself what they call a ‘success’—and look at the competition, Evvy! Meanwhile each season brings a class of shrieking débutantes crashing into the ballroom, perfectly confident that they're the most attractive things the world's ever seen. And apparently they convince the fickle stag line that they are——”

“The stag line doesn't represent the entire masculine world,” he argued.

“Perhaps not, but it thinks it does. And then we've been trained to regard it as the most staple source of husbands.”

He roared good-naturedly, but deep down within him felt infinitely sorry at this revelation of an unsuspected cynicism in her.

“The stags would flee for their lives from a party if they knew that's the way you labeled them,” he told her, smiling.

He rose, stretching himself languidly.

"Oh, well—tell Lottie I'll be along to her party about half past eleven."

He crossed the room to his bureau, commenced a lazy search for a clean white waistcoat. Emily paused for an instant, irresolutely, at the door; then disappeared in a whirl of chiffon, leaving behind her the faintest perceptible scent of orchids.

II

Lottie Barlow's coming-out dance was given at the Ritz where a nightly series of such affairs was being held during the holiday week. Everett was careful not to put in an appearance before eleven forty-five, previous experience having taught him that an earlier arrival spelt physical exhaustion long before the end of the dance; he had long been convinced that on a ballroom floor the female of the species could outsurvive the male.

After checking his hat and coat he stood for a while, idly smoking a cigarette, at the foot of the Y-shaped stairs that ascended in wide, gentle steps to the ballroom. In the narrow, mirrored hall detached groups of men stood about him, some keeping an anxious eye on the revolving entrance door. There was a large sprinkling of freshmen present, distinctly more cheerful and noisy than the rest, casually dressed in dinner coats and awry ties; a few Harvard seniors, tall, carefully groomed, delightfully sure of themselves; larger groups of

Princetonians, and Elis, frivolous, bantering, flushed with the evening's prospects; one or two swarthy foreigners, standing aloof, slightly over-mannered, perhaps, to meet the approval of the others, as they clicked their heels and bowed ceremoniously to incoming girls. Also, several of those mysterious men who seem to attend every party of the season, and yet were the cause of constant speculation as to whether they had been invited or not . . . especially when they slid out from their isolation to greet effusively some bobbed-haired damsel who nodded coolly in return.

Presently Everett tossed his cigarette into a bowl of palms and ascended the stairs. The rheumatic, purple-faced old man, whose duty it had seemingly been since time immemorial to announce the names of arriving guests at these functions, leaned forward with a wrinkled, questioning look. Everett whispered his name, and had the satisfaction of hearing "Mr. Hail" bawled into the hostess' ear above the clamor of the music.

Lottie Barlow, tall, dignified and colorless, was standing beside her father and mother at the ball-room entrance—a nonentity, Everett knew, and highly popular—with girls; the principal thing he noticed about her was the enormous, trailing bouquet of roses clutched feverishly in her left hand. He shook hands with her, was propelled onward by an unseen tide of humanity behind him, dimly conscious of a bewildered-looking little man with a bald

head, and a gray-haired colossal woman with a fixed, mechanical smile who kept reiterating:

"So glad you could come. . . ."

One of the orchestras—there were two that night—was playing "Margie" from a trellised fence of smilax as he slid to the middle of the ballroom and dived into the swaying black and white mass of the stag-line; it was insufferably hot, noisy. . . . A long-haired youth asked him in enraptured tones the name of the girl wearing the yellow dress "with the green stuff on it," and Everett, not knowing her, merely shrugged his shoulders. A moment later he caught sight of Edith Way suffering the tortures of the damned with an elderly Frenchman who was gyrating about the room with great abandon, and glided to her rescue.

"Hul-lo Evvy," she murmured, as the Frenchman was swept into oblivion, "do you still love me?" She was totally unaware that this had, by now, become her recognized form of greeting. He told her gently that it was time she improved her "line." Edith, he knew, was the girl who had been known to hint to four different men at a certain party that she had no supper partner; unfortunately, after her triumphant gathering of them round her supper table they had compared notes . . .

This was a season when the toddle was in vogue, and he went bobbing limply and casually about the room, holding his partner at an oblique angle, chatting as he went, she looking up at him, laughing

demurely, bobbed curls dancing gaily about her plump cheeks.

Supper, served at pink-shaded tables in the great oval-shaped dining room, subduedly lighted, always appealed to him; he liked to sit quietly at the table, smoking cigarette after cigarette, gazing thoughtfully at the chattering throng about him. Edith Way thought everything either "perfectly divine" or "heavenly," and, although he approved her attitude of thoroughly enjoying life, he found the conversation distinctly lagging over the coffee. After he had seen her successfully launched in the ballroom he strolled out to the lounge where a row of perspiring waiters were dispensing unlimited quantities of orangeade—and met Piggy Trehearn.

Piggy greeted him affably; he was one of those fat, amiable, self-sufficient creatures who apparently manage to have a good time wherever they go. They retired to a discreet corner behind some palms where Piggy produced from his hip pocket an enormous flask.

"You look blue," he remarked, proffering it. "This ought to cheer you up."

Everett snorted.

"Blue? No—it's not that; I'm just plain bored." He waved his hand in a sweeping, comprehensive gesture toward the ballroom. "What's all this prove, anyway?"

Piggy surveyed him thoughtfully.

"Trouble with you, Everett," he said, handing him

the flask, "is that you're too damned analytical. A fellow doesn't want to get in the habit of prodding into the reason for everything. When you stop to think, most amusements are senseless. You ought to come to this party saying 'I'm out for a good time'—and have it."

"How do you have a good time?" Everett asked dubiously, emptying a third of the flask at one gulp and making a wry face.

"Give some girl a huge rush," Piggy suggested, eyeing the flask anxiously. "This business of dancing politely with every girl you've ever met—bah! it doesn't work. You'd have a more exciting time if you tried to dance with every girl you hadn't met——"

Everett frowned; ignored the attempted facetiousness.

"There's nothing to this 'rush' idea," he said. "Believe me, I've tried it. The thing lasts—possibly—six weeks; you have a pretty good time as long as that. Then what happens? You get to a certain stage where you've got to go forward or go back—stage varies with girl's amount of sophistication. If you're serious, or fool yourself into thinking you are, you go forward—wedding bells, n'everything . . . But—here's the point; if you go back she either becomes a human iceberg, or eyes you reproachfully for ever afterwards—or, possibly, if she's a wise one, you become what they call 'good friends' which is an utterly impossible relationship in which

you keep on dancing with her for the rest of your life and wonder what the devil to talk to her about. Am I right?"

Piggy shook his head.

"I don't agree. The trouble with you is, probably, that with most girls you've reached that hopeless stage where you've got beyond her superficialities that momentarily interest you, and haven't reached her real nature—it's only then that you become 'good friends' as you call it."

"I've never discovered a woman's real nature yet," Everett retorted almost irritably, "and you can't convince me that you have, Piggy."

They started back toward the ballroom together.

It was at that precise moment that Everett, for the first time in his life, set eyes on Margaret Blair. She was coming slowly up the stairs from the supper room, followed by two or three important-looking and immaculately dressed youths with sleek black hair and pink cheeks. Whether he had any acquaintances among the men Everett never stopped to think; his eyes were riveted in a wholly fascinated stare upon the girl; the cigarette in his hand burned down to his fingertips, until he extinguished it with subdued profanity. . . . She was tall, taller than the average girl at the dance; dressed in white and silver; she carried, casually, an enormous emerald-colored ostrich fan. Her figure, he thought, was almost childishly immature, and on account of her height her movements were—well, just a trifle coltish, yet

not awkward; there was something entrancingly vital and youthful about her, he concluded. There was no denying that she was extremely pretty, with her large, candid gray-green eyes, the white softness of her complexion; her mouth, too—a cupid's bow mouth, such as he had imagined existed only in the minds of magazine-cover artists. Her hair, abundant with little curls, was a sombre gold in color. She seemed to be laughing a great deal. . . . Everett, watching her in a haze of inexplicable joy, thought her quite perfect.

Later on he caught sight of her again in the ball-room, dancing with a five-foot Grotonian; she was stooping just a little as she danced, her fragile shoulders bent slightly forward. He rushed across the room, seized the arm of a man who had just been dancing with her, and secured a mumbled introduction.

He had scarcely danced a half dozen steps with her before an idiotic creature, smirking broadly, pushed him aside, saying, "May I break up this little party?"

Anyhow, he had met her!

III

He made what he considered the proper impression by cutting in on her five times within the next quarter of an hour. Towards one o'clock he persuaded her gently that she needed a rest and a cigar-

ette, and led her out of the ballroom. They sat down on one of the steep little stairways leading to the balconies that overlooked the dancing floor, where couples were constantly ascending and descending, causing Everett to rise and make way for them with irritating frequency. A six-foot brunette with a reputation for facetiousness shook her finger laughingly at Margaret: "Sitting out again? My dear, why don't you *hire* the stairs?"—but Margaret gazed at her demurely, wholly unperturbed.

Presently Everett decided to test her out; he was not definitely sure as to what he was going to say. His tongue seemed to be playing tricks with him . . .

"I've been watching you all the evening," he blurted out. "Wanting to meet you. Obsessed with the idea. Positively. Never had such a definite purpose in view before, I assure you."

The gray-green eyes widened perceptibly; for a moment he expected a snub, or, possibly, a flippant remark. Instead:

"You're not very complimentary to think that kind of thing pleases me. It's highly unoriginal, to say the least."

"Well!" he said, astonished. "You appear to have intellect."

She laughed at that, a delightfully subdued, rippling little laugh.

"Thanks for being so candid. You mean you expected that you'd drawn an absolute blank. I suppose it must be a great relief to be like that; all a

girl has to do is to smile and listen while men tell her their life's history."

"You interest me," he told her, importantly. "I think we're going to be very good friends."

"Platonic friends?"

"There's no such thing." He was, of a sudden, lucid, vehement. He waved his arms. "One can pretend at it, of course——"

She laughed.

"As a matter of fact I feel that way about it myself. I just wanted to see whether you'd figured out that very elementary problem——"

"In the cradle," he assured her. "I'm a worldly man. I——"

She threw a warning yet humorous glance at him.

"Now please don't begin talking about your worldliness. Men of your age—I suppose you're under twenty-five—seem to take an intense joy in airing their indiscretions—just why, I can't imagine. Perhaps it's something to do with that old saying about every woman loving a rake."

"I am a rake," he asserted gaily, "a bold, bad, blustering rake. I don't belong here at all; I must be what the psychologists term a 'throw back.' I ought to have been rampant centuries ago—a swash-buckling bandit, or a knight with a white horse and armor; Robin Hood—anything like that."

"An adventurer with a suitable background?"

"Exactly. With a background of highways

and byways and rude taverns. Sword duels. Jolly old England. Ale and cheese and fair, fat ladies. . . ."

"How you love to talk about yourself," she murmured, plucking a stray fragment of feather from her fan.

"I don't," he protested,—“really I don't. I'm the most modest fellow.”

She laughed again.

"Oh, I know you assume an air of modesty—but that's really a part of conceit, isn't it?"

He was crestfallen, vaguely aware that he was perilously near making a fool of himself.

"I see I'm not up to your mental standard to-night," he admitted. "Come out with me some time, won't you? I like you a whole lot. What class of family restrictions do you come under? Are you completely emancipated? Someone really ought to standarize the rules for *débutantes*."

She rose and started down the stairs.

"I'll come out to tea with you some time. Only don't make any rash appointments now. We'll see whether your interest in me stands the test of a telephone call a week from now."

He took her back to the ballroom; and almost immediately someone swept her away.

He found himself, by accident, face to face with Ella Cloyne; for years he had been dancing with Ella, merely because he knew that if he failed to do so she would reproach him at their next encounter

with a: "Well—I thought you'd forgotten my existence!"

Feeling particularly pleased with the world, he made himself unusually agreeable to her.

CHAPTER IV

I

FROM the middle of February onwards he worked on a salary basis at Trehearn's. It was his business to supervise the new filing system—a pet hobby of the old man's—to keep several thousand diminutive colored slips of pasteboard numerically arranged in a steel-drawered cabinet, so that the partners could ascertain at a moment's notice full details of any particular piece of property in which they were interested; it was also part of his business to see that additional cards were prepared to indicate newly-acquired property, and to alter the old ones whenever necessary. There were pink "For Sale" cards, green cards denoting property "For Rent," yellow cards to cover certain suburban acreage. After a week at the filing system he would walk home in a species of trance, red, green and yellow slips dancing before his eyes.

When he mildly suggested to Forrester, the junior partner, that any ten-year-old boy could do what he was doing he was informed that he was gaining invaluable experience.

By the end of the month he loathed the sight of

the filing cabinet, and even enjoyed the momentary, if not thrilling, respite of operating the automatic letter opener.

He discovered that commissions were not coming his way, and he entertained a growing conviction that he was being, somehow, stifled, held down in a corner . . . Indeed, he became so certain that he knew the files by heart that he dropped the precaution of consulting the index book before filing a new card; it was this, ultimately, that led to disaster. His work became the mere process of an automaton; his mind was far, far away; time and again he turned his eyes toward the clock and mentally counted the hours until merciful release was due.

On the first Monday in March one of the stenographers emerged from old Trehearn's inner office and asked Everett for certain details concerning a house near Larchmont; this house had been rented a week previously by the junior partner, but Everett had somehow omitted to alter the card; he handed it to the girl, who went back to the inner office.

At five o'clock she reappeared, red-eyed and mutinous. She seized her hat from a peg, jammed it upon her neat, canary-colored head and started toward the street door.

"Where you going?" Everett asked as she passed him. "You're half an hour ahead of time."

She turned and faced him, white with anger. She was rather a pretty little thing with pale, delicate features.

"I've quit," she said, jerking her head toward the inner office. "Old Trehearn bawled me out, an' I wouldn't stand for it."

"What for?" His sympathy was mingled with an overwhelming curiosity.

This seemed to make her supremely angry.

"What for? You oughter know! That Larchmont property was rented a week ago by Forrester, an' you didn't make a note of it on the files, you poor boob! I wrote a letter, at Trehearn's dictation, offering it for sale to one of his best clients; he signed it and sent it. Then the junior partner comes in and tells him it's been rented while he was away sick last week. Ain't that a hell of a note?"

He jumped up from his chair.

"Of course you told them it was my mistake?"

She smiled wanly.

"That's for them to find out. Anyways, I wouldn't stay on here for a bet."

Before he could stop her she had gone; he heard the plate glass door leading to the street clang to heavily. He was amazed, shaken; he hadn't known before that loyalty of this kind existed; he decided that he must make the matter right as soon as he could. He stepped over to Trehearn's door, and knocked.

"What's the matter now?" Trehearn asked, glaring up at him from an untidy heap of papers, as he entered.

"I wanted to tell you," Everett said, very quietly,

"that I made the mistake on the Larchmont house. It wasn't Miss Crowder's fault, after all."

"Humph— You're too careless. Now excuse me please; I'm busy."

But Everett lingered, with a certain dogged persistence.

". . . As it wasn't her fault, shouldn't we take her back?"

Trehearn brought his fist down on the desk violently.

"I can't waste my time discussing ethical questions with you, Gail. The girl's gone; we can easily get another. Meanwhile, don't make any more mistakes in your filing. One would think that anybody could operate a simple affair like that without making bungles——"

A wave of rising anger surged into Everett's brain.

"Anyone could," he retorted. "That's just my point, Mr. Trehearn. You need someone with less initiative to do a mechanical task of that kind. Give me a real man's job and I'll show you what I can do——"

"If you don't like the work we've given you," said Trehearn coldly, "we can dispense with your services."

"Thank you," said Everett. "I'll take the opportunity"; and walked calmly out of the offices.

He strolled homeward feeling strangely and ridiculously happy; he realized, all of a sudden, that this

was the very thing he had been waiting for, hoping for, week after week. There was an immense satisfaction, he concluded, in declaring one's independence of people like Trehearn . . .

When he reached the house he decided, impulsively, to consult his father.

II

It was only on the rarest of occasions that Everett deliberately sought his father's advice—especially since they had moved into the new house; for during these days they scarcely saw each other, except at the dinner table, or, perhaps, for a few minutes afterwards when the family gathered in the drawing room. This afternoon, however, he felt that he must unburden himself of his troubles. The Governor, as he called him, would at least listen without being derisive—which was more than he could hope from most of his friends. His mother would, of course, be sympathetic, but not actively helpful. One needed a man's views in such a case.

He found his father in the library, seated in a leather armchair before the great marble mantelpiece, reading his favorite Republican newspaper; Everett had shunned this journal of late, because he believed it unduly biased in politics; Everett liked broad-mindedness, vision; he had voted for the Democratic governor because he believed him to be a good man—at least he thought that was why he had

voted Democratic; as a matter of fact he had really done it to assert his individuality, because he had little respect for the dyed-in-the-wool Republicanism of family traditions. This had invoked parental wrath. . . .

His father regarded his entrance into the room with a vague, uneasy curiosity, manifestly convinced that trouble of some kind would be forthcoming.

"Father," he began, loudly casual. "I've quit my job."

John Gail laid aside his newspaper with careful deliberation and glanced at him over the top of his spectacles.

"Have you had a better offer?"

Everett shook his head, stood with his hands in his pockets and feet wide astride before the fireplace.

"No."

He was beginning to be a shade nervous because his father seemed so cool, unperturbed.

"Are you going to get another job?"

"Try to."

"Tell me, if you don't mind, why you left Trehearn's?"

Everett hesitated an instant before answering.

"Because," he burst out, "I got sick of filing silly little colored cards all day long. I—I felt as if I were going through kindergarten again. I told Forrester, the junior partner, how I felt about it, and he gave me a two-hour shift on the automatic letter opener—for variety, I suppose."

At last John Gail showed signs of being angry; a slow flush mounted to his pallid cheeks. Had Everett told him the whole story, the incident of the discharged stenographer, he would doubtless have forgiven him—perhaps even been secretly proud of him. But Everett was, as a matter of fact, too genuine to make capital out of the episode, realizing that he had used it merely as an excuse to obtain his freedom from Trehearn's; he wanted the Governor to know exactly how he felt about the firm.

"What's the matter with you, anyway, Everett?" his father burst out. "First you chuck college because of an idea that you'll do better in business; you ask me approve of that. Then you chuck away employment with a reputable firm just because you happened to be bored with the work they've given you. I suppose you want me to approve of that, too. My God—you'd think fathers were made just to approve of everything their sons do!"

Everett felt a little more of his self-possession slipping from him.

"What do you intend to do now?"

His father's voice took on a trace of anxiety; anger had vanished, as swiftly as it had arisen.

"—Tell me exactly what you'd like to do, and I'll try to help you, if I can."

He perched himself upon the arm of his father's chair, just as he had always done when he was a little fellow. It creaked ominously.

"You'll break this chair, Everett."

(Even this didn't work as you expected it.)

He drew a long breath.

"That's just the question. I really don't know what I want to do; but I must do *something*. I'm not the only one—we're all restless and helpless, more or less—the young ones, I mean."

He paused, began to bite his finger nails. It was, he discovered, confoundingly difficult to explain what he meant.

"I don't know what's upset us all."

"The War?" suggested John Gail, tentatively. Everett, understanding that he was trying to help him, felt grateful.

"Yes—that's a good deal to do with it, I suppose. Over two years have passed, but the world's not the same place . . . it wasn't actually the soldiering that made the change; it was everything that went with it—pride and uniforms, the realization that you, at eighteen, could do tremendous things yourself . . . and then all the rotten side of it, cruelty; petty jealousies; lust for killing; women, of a kind you never met before. . . . Oh, damn it, Father, I can't explain. We've changed, I guess—and our sense of values is all upset, topsy-turvy. Things that used to seem worth while seem futile now, and that makes us all discontented, restless as the very deuce— I went into business because I thought that it was the thing to do, but I couldn't stand a job like that . . . give me something with some kick to it, at least——"

He paused, then added vaguely:

"It's a kind of germ in the air, I suppose, and I've caught it badly."

"What you need," said his father grimly, "is some good hard work—like I had when I was your age."

Everett shrugged his shoulders.

"There isn't any, at least not the kind I'm eligible for. The world doesn't even work like it used to. Everyone's full of beautiful ideas and fine phrases, and nobody gets anywhere. Why, you can't find standing room in the subway at ten a. m. these days, because most of New York is just deciding to start to work at that hour——"

His lips curled into a slight sneer.

"Sometimes I wonder what good it was for you to spend all that money giving me an education, then to have me floundering about, trying to find one single thing I could do properly."

"There's always the Law," John Gail suggested softly.

Everett shook his head.

"The War queered that for me; I'd have a long white beard before I was ready to pass my bar examination. Too many got ahead of me while I was fooling around in those radio schools kidding people into the idea that I was helping my country——"

"You're a little too bitter, my boy. Now, if you'd explain to me what you'd like to do——"

A sudden brightness came into Everett's eyes; he gripped his father's arm.

"I'll try to tell you what's the matter—then perhaps you'll understand what I'm groping for; I'm looking for something very vague and big;—a whole lot of things collected together—experiences. . . . I want to touch Life itself, to feel the very breath of it; I want to—go through something that would give me an opportunity of testing myself; something that would show me just what I was really worth. . . ."

He broke off, suddenly abashed.

"Maybe you think I'm crazy, talking like this—"

John Gail rose slowly, laying a tender hand on his shoulder.

"Thank you Everett," he said simply, "for trying to tell me how you feel. It's just a little difficult for a man growing old like myself to comprehend—times have changed, certainly, and you young people have ideas born of your own times and experiences; we recognize that—but it's a little hard to get together, isn't it? However, I must say I think you've got a little too much imagination. Try to curb it and you'll be happier."

With that he was gone. Everett knew that he had not quite understood. . . .

III

Late that night as Everett was undressing Stoddard came into his bedroom, a pair of tremendous

books on architecture under his arm, and sat down languidly in an armchair. Stoddard was short-sighted and had a habit of peering owlshly through his horn-rimmed spectacles at whoever he was talking to; just at this moment the habit vaguely annoyed Everett; he had particularly desired to be left alone. Stoddard's lack of neatness, too, irritated Everett who took considerable pains about his appearance. Why couldn't the fellow brush his hair properly?

Stoddard's opening remark was, to say the least, unfortunate.

"Hear you've lost your job, Everett."

Everett imagined, perhaps, a patronizing touch in his tone.

"So I have. What about it?"

Stoddard regarded the tips of his shoes, smiling faintly.

"Thought you might have stuck it out a little longer. Anyone can see that it's worried the Governor considerably. In fact, he's always worrying about you lately——"

"Meaning that you, being absolute perfection, should be my example? You've done good work, Stoddard, but you needn't crow about it."

Stoddard raised his eyebrows.

"Don't be so confoundedly touchy. I came here to discuss with you what you might do. I thought I might help you—especially as you don't seem to have definite leanings toward anything in particular.

Personally, I think you made a mistake to leave New Haven——”

Everett wheeled round to face him, waving a toothbrush and tumbler in the air.

“Look here, Stoddard,” he said, desperately. “You’ve got your work cut out for you. You and those like you who know just what you can do in life will never be able to realize what we others—the uncertain ones—go through; it’s hell, I tell you—hell. —Now let’s consider the subject closed. I’m glad you’re happy yourself, but I don’t need your advice.”

“It’s impossible to discuss anything with you,” Stoddard replied, with all the manly dignity of nineteen, and stalked out of the room.

“Little prig,” murmured Everett, as he switched out the light and tumbled into bed.

CHAPTER V

I

EVERETT had intended to go in search of a new job immediately; but as the days drifted by and spring approached, bringing with it a certain drowsy lassitude, he found himself temporarily content to idle away the hours. He was grateful, in a way, to his father and mother because they avoided any reference to Trehearn's, although he had a secret feeling that they expected him to get to work pretty soon . . . they left him much to his own devices. During the warm, idle days he found himself taking a wholly new and fervid interest in literature, indirectly due to the fact that he had recently formed a friendship with a little man called Baizely, an assistant editor of a literary magazine, whom he frequently met at dinners and dances. For the first time in his life he spent long hours in his room, reading; this at least gave him the consolatory thought that he was not entirely idle. Once, in a fit of energy and repentance, he spent a whole day tramping about Wall Street trying to find a job; his lack of experience prevented

him from discovering anything better than an offer of sixteen dollars a week as a "runner," which he refused with so much sarcasm that the broker who tendered it was rendered speechless with indignation.

On several occasions he took Margaret Blair out to insignificant little entertainments—movies, first, perhaps, and then the Plaza for tea. He found her each time, somehow, more delightful and amusing than the last; they had adopted a peculiar form of bantering toward each other which was at least refreshing. She had, too, a faculty of always appearing beautiful—and this in itself gave him a vague, selfish satisfaction in being seen with her. Other girls began to talk . . .

As she grew to like him she became frankly worried at the fact that he was not working.

"You've got to do something, Evvy," she told him very gravely one afternoon when they were walking in Central Park. "You've got to. You're worth too much to have people saying that you're a loafer."

"I must find something worth while first," he told her.

"Wall Street?" she suggested vaguely.

He laughed mirthlessly.

"I'd be no good; I could never get up any enthusiasm over figures; I wouldn't care a hang whether the bottom fell out of Consolidated Cornbeef——"

She stamped her well-shod little foot.

"Can't you ever be serious?"

"Not about things like that," he said with conviction.

She left him with patent disapproval written in her eyes that afternoon. In her mind Wall Street was a tremendous, intricate mystery; yet she believed there was room for everyone there. She felt sure that any man who had the will could find a job dealing with stocks, and bonds, and margins—and make untold money. . . .

II

During these days he was giving himself more and more to a habit of introspection—a thing which he had never done before. Life suddenly assumed tremendous proportions, loomed up as a vast problem in his mind; he himself became an absorbing subject for thought. At meals he hardly spoke to the rest of the family.

A series of warm, sultry nights heralded spring, during which he passed many hours wide awake, fitfully tossing about in his bed; now and then, through the open French windows of his bedroom, he heard a motor speeding up Fifth Avenue with a metallic hum of tires on the smooth asphalt. All the world seemed, to him, on pleasure bent; all New York appeared to spend its nights careering from one place of amusement to another.

There must be something more in life, he told

himself again and again. So many hours a day in an office; mechanical work; stuff he wasn't in the least interested in. So many hours made a week; so many weeks made a month; so many months a year—then, perhaps, promotion. A new man to boss you; a few more men to boss. . . .

He told his father that he had discovered the world, found it out; that it wasn't what it was cracked up to be. John Gail replied acidly that many men of twenty-two had said the same thing.

He slept less each night.

Nothing to look forward to!

In the evenings, dances; lots of girls; jazz music; mild flirtations; drinks—or, for variation, that other kind of party, which sometimes began as a “stag” affair and ended up differently; roadsters; road houses; plump, pert chorus girls; a certain amount of indifferent love-making; heavy bills—and bromo seltzer the next morning . . . eventually you grew tired of that type of amusement, or devoted your whole life to it.

After a while, perhaps, he would marry a “nice” girl, and settle down in perfect respectability in a Park Avenue apartment, for which his father would advance the rent; play bridge nightly with other urbane young married couples of his own “set”; he would grow old, eventually, and fat—and, possibly, prosperous if he were lucky enough to find a career to his liking.

Nothing to it!

Time and again he deserted his bed in the small, still hours of the morning to pace the floor of his room:

"God! If I could only do something *different!*"

He was, as a matter of fact, undergoing that peculiar form of mental agony which only the very young suffer—and only a few of these—when they're on the brink of life, and unnerved by a stupendous and dreadful fear of failure because they have not yet proved themselves capable. . . .

There was, moreover, that germ of restlessness in his system which craved continually for something—he knew not what.

He came to the ultimate conclusion that life was not the glorious series of adventures he had once imagined it to be.

III

He stood at his window one April morning, unconsciously absorbed in the gentle beauty of early spring. The park, pale green, flecked with golden sunlight; the vivid blueness of the serene sky; the warm fragrance of the morning breeze, sent the blood coursing sharply through his veins, awakened him suddenly to the joy of living. Problems of existence were, for the while, banished from his mind.

On impulse he hurried to the telephone and called up Margaret.

"I'm going to get my car out," he told her exult-

antly, "and we'll go way, way out in the country somewhere, to spend the day."

At ten o'clock he drove his car down to her house, a dozen blocks away. She appeared, presently, on the doorstep, fresh and summery in a childish dress of apple green, a large, limp hat of wide-brimmed straw. He was conscious of an overwhelming admiration for her at the moment, a sheer pleasure in the mere fact of her proximity. He found himself speculating as to whether he was actually in love with her; his mother, he remembered, had once told him that if there was the slightest doubt in his mind about his loving a girl he wasn't in love with her at all. He wasn't quite sure about that theory . . .

He drove up Fifth Avenue at characteristic speed; he had, invariably, the utmost confidence in himself when at the wheel of his car—a confidence not always shared by his passengers. Margaret, however, seemed devoid of nerves; indeed, she even laughed when on a stretch of muddy road near New Rochelle they skidded, and narrowly missed contact with a telegraph pole. He admired her all the more for that.

Somewhere beyond Rye they turned into a leafy, winding lane and cut across country toward the Hudson.

At a particularly tranquil, shady spot he stopped the car suddenly. The countryside was warm; shimmering waves of heat spiralled upward from the white surface of the road; a faint breeze idly stirred the budding foliage of wayside elms.

Impulsively he leaned over and kissed her lips. She submitted coolly, almost indifferently, her eyes wide open. He was aware of being obscurely shocked at her composure. . . .

"Margaret," he whispered, "Margaret. You don't care for me at all, do you? When I'm just crazy about you."

She pushed him away, smiling lazily, her big gray-green eyes tenderly humorous.

"Everett, dear, stop it! Spring's gone to your head. I—I suppose you like me all right, and it's very lovely to be out here—but you can't honestly and truly say that you love me, can you?"

Her candid gaze met his, unflinching; he hung his head unconsciously.

"I'm pretty sure of it, Margaret."

Her sense of humor then came to the rescue; she laughed, that subdued, delicious little laugh of hers.

"Oh, Everett, you're a perfect scream. You don't just know what you want—whether it's a girl, or business, or anything else. Suppose you tell me exactly what you want, most of all?"

He frowned, his hands playing idly with the steering wheel.

"I want to get something worth while out of life!"

He restarted the car; shot down the road at a reckless pace, eloquent of his state of mind.

They lunched at a placid little white inn hidden behind a mass of elms, not very far from Tarrytown. He left the car at a garage a few hundred

yards down the road, as there was a minor repair to be done, and they found a table under the trees beside a red brick, moss-grown path that led to a formal little garden ablaze with tulips. An old woman, haggard and toothless, came up to them with a basket full of flowers, and when Margaret said that she liked them Everett purchased the whole basket. She reproved him gently for his extravagance, but it made his heart thump within him to see her glistening eyes as she buried her face in the white yielding mass of buds. It was all very pleasant and delightful. Never, he felt, had he spent quite such a perfect day. . . .

After luncheon was over he told her to wait while he went to fetch the car.

IV

There was a trolley track, irregular and weed-grown, running parallel to the road, Everett noticed, as he swung out of the garage and headed in the direction of the inn where Margaret was awaiting him. A hundred yards from the garage he came to an abrupt turn in the road; as he slowed down a tiny girl in a vivid red dress clambered down from a stone wall by the roadside and came scampering directly across the path of his car. He applied the brakes sharply; halted. The child, unharmed and giggling, sped across the road and on to the trolley track. He swore quietly and restarted the car.

Around the corner came an open trolley, reeling and swaying, packed to overflowing; men clinging perilously to the running board. The child looked up, stumbled on the track, and fell in a sprawling, helpless heap. Everett heard her thin little wail curling up into the air; the insistent clamor of the trolley's gong. . . . His foot came down hard on the accelerator; he swung the steering wheel round; the car, responding like a living thing, plunged onto the track; then he threw on the brakes. . . . He was dimly aware of the motorman shouting, frantically spinning the handbrake; the trolley loomed over him, gigantic, grotesque. Came a grinding, scraping crash; broken glass from the windscreen, pouring in a blinding, glittering shower over his head and face. . . .

He stood up swaying, almost stunned. A shrill peal of laughter from the little girl reached his ears, as if from a great distance. Passengers from the trolley surrounded him in a blurred, shouting, gesticulating swarm. He saw the motorman, with a red gash across his cheeks truculent, yet, somehow, pitiful. . . . A fat man, too, in striped shirt sleeves with a straw hat on the back of his head, trying to make himself heard above the babel of excited voices:

"He did it to save the kid, I tell you. I was on the front platform, I saw him. . . ."

Two young men in the background attempted a spontaneous but feeble cheer. The motorman, still

truculent, pointed to the fender of his trolley, reduced to a twisted, meaningless heap of metal.

"Yeah—but what about that? They'll hold me responsible."

"I'll settle that," Everett heard himself say loudly; he felt curiously light-headed; there was something warm, too, trickling down his cheek.

A stout Irishwoman screamed.

"The lad's hurt—and bless his heart. The bravest thing I've seen in all me born days."

And, then, to his utter shame she bent down, tore off a piece of flamboyant petticoat, and insisted upon tenderly binding his head.

There was, presently, a slight commotion in the crowd, and Margaret was suddenly at his side, pale and trembling, her lips pressed together in a queer little straight white line; he felt her cool hand in his, and it fortified him.

"If you can do that kind of thing," she whispered, her eyes very wide and shining, "you needn't worry about yourself."

She was very near to loving him just then.

V

At the garage they said that it would take several days to repair the car, so he and Margaret decided to pass the afternoon quietly under the elm trees by the inn until it was time to take the train home.

"I wonder," she asked, out of a clear sky, "why we're all so discontented at heart, Everett? It isn't playing the game, when you come to think of it. Parents, for instance—they didn't have half the pleasures, or half the liberty we have, when they were young. And yet they seem to have enjoyed themselves twice as much."

"I know," Everett said. "Bicycling and cotillions—formal Sunday afternoon teas. Perhaps it worked beautifully; but the world's changed since then, and it's hard for some of them to realize it——"

He leaned forward, increasingly vehement.

"I'll tell you one of the things that makes life complicated for us just now. We've been brought up soaked in traditions and conventions, and all of a sudden we've discovered that we can discard them without doing ourselves the least harm—and then we're not happy till we have discarded them."

She saw what he meant, and added eagerly:

"Yes—and when you realize that what you thought all along was final, isn't final at all but merely what people told you——"

"The world's got to go on. . . ." Everett said importantly, drumming his fingers on the table.

And so they threshed it out, until the shadows lengthened under the trees and the sun dropped behind the hills across the Hudson; and, although they came to no definite conclusions they felt that

they understood each other far better than before. . . .

At six o'clock they hurried, arm in arm, down the winding road to Tarrytown and boarded a homeward-bound train.

CHAPTER VI

I

EVERETT'S newest friend, Baizely the magazine editor, used to pop up unexpectedly in the stag-line of various débutante parties and invite him to a chat and a cigarette in a quiet corner; this marked the beginning of an entirely new phase in Everett's life—a sudden and fervid interest in art and literature. With him as a willing, interested audience Baizely would sometimes work himself into an extraordinary pitch of enthusiasm over some disputed question of technique, rumpling his smooth, honey-colored hair as he talked, until it stood up straight from his head like the crest of some ridiculous cockatoo; on such occasions he looked, Everett thought, for all the world like a very excited, hot little boy at play.

"Now, there's Meissonier," Baizely once remarked,—“look at his pictures through a magnifying glass, and you'll discover infinite detail—things which the human eye overlooks. That may be perfect mechanics, but it's hardly art——”

Everett happened to repeat this to Cuyler Vanderventer, an old-fashioned New Yorker who used to

dine frequently at the Gail's. Vanderventer, to his dismay, promptly vowed that Baizely talked stuff and nonsense, and that Meissonier's art was unquestioned. Divergences of opinion such as this enabled Everett the better to realize the limitless field he had embarked upon.

He was whole-heartedly enthusiastic—as he was, inevitably, over anything new—for several weeks. For the first time in his life he found himself wandering about art galleries; on one occasion he purchased several Kirschner prints at an art shop, and thereby unwittingly provoked a discussion at the family dinner table as to whether they were really artistic, or mere camouflage for vulgarity. His father mildly took the former view, but his mother firmly requested him never again to decorate the walls of any room in *her* house with such pictures.

From art Baizely led him gently on to literature. Everett, whose previous literary diet had been confined to adventures on the Yukon Trail and the Northwest Frontier—plus a minimum of compulsory Walter Scott—had his eyes suddenly opened to a new vista of things. His mother discovering him reading Gorky at two in the morning, was vaguely worried. . . .

Speculating upon the possibility of his having creative ability himself he stayed up for several nights composing lyrical poems. Baizely pronounced them no worse than the average neophyte's, thereby needlessly compelling him to consult the dictionary.

"It's only a phase," his father said hopefully. "He'll get over it in time—like everything else."

A poet friend of Baizely's told him that he must see dawn from Brooklyn Bridge, which he did, and incidentally discovered that New York has its moments of infinite beauty.

"I think I'll go to live in Greenwich Village," he told Baizely impulsively, one evening after dinner at the Yale Club, "and get the proper atmosphere."

Baizely's frown of disapproval came as a considerable surprise to him.

"Ever been there?" he asked, sucking at his pipe.

"Only to a couple of those cellar restaurants——"

"Once," Baizely said, confidentially, over their coffee, "about two years ago I myself had an idea that Greenwich Village might develop some hidden spring of talent within me. O fatal error! I found quarters on the top floor of a house in Thompson Street. I had two fellow-boarders—one was a fervid little painter, obsessed with what he called The Immensity of Existence, which he tried to depict in green and purple blotches on a ten-inch canvas. The other was a poetic exponent of Free Love who hadn't enough cash to put his theories into practice; he was rather pathetic. . . . I endured them, somehow, for three months, and then got tired of their perpetual cynicisms, and left them."

"I wonder if they're still there," Everett mused. Baizely laughed softly.

"They used to hold a kind of reception every

Friday night—tonight's Friday. If you care to go we might look them up—" he paused, smiling ironically— "but I'll only take you there because I want to get this Greenwich Village idea out of your head; the more you dwell on it the more magnificent it will become in your mind. As a matter of fact, the only clever thing about Greenwich Village is the way it manages to advertise itself—they have specially-trained spiders down there, I believe, to weave suitable cobwebs on the walls. . . ."

It was about nine o'clock when they reached Thompson Street and entered the door of a sombre building whose red brick walls were disfigured by an intricate mass of flimsy fire escapes. Baizely led the way along a narrow, gaslit passage and up endless, creaking stairs.

Everett presently found himself in a dimly-lighted room, had a blurred impression of being introduced to a swarm of babbling people. Everyone was sitting, for some obscure reason, cross-legged on the floor, although there were plenty of empty chairs, and also a sagging divan in the corner of the room.

"Welcome," said a tall, cadaverous man with a black beard, who looked, Everett thought, like a Giotto John the Baptist. "Our little gathering hails you with open arms as fellow artists."

He turned to Everett.

"And are you wielder of the brush or the pen?"

"Neither," said Everett, and added in an uncon-

trollable spirit of mischief: "I'm a filing system expert."

John the Baptist, utterly crushed, melted into the crowd.

Presently a young man with an astonishingly pale face and unruly black hair began to read extracts from Bandelaire; these he followed with a poem of his own composition, which he modestly referred to as a "whimsical gem of thought" ("Conceited ass!" whispered Everett to Baizely at his side). The title of the poem, the poet announced was "My Soul is like a Stained Glass Window." He added, with a certain incomprehensible pride, that it had already been rejected by twenty-seven magazines.

"We are above the level of the public prints, I fear," he remarked demurely, "because we refuse to become slaves of tradition."

Next appeared a young lady with strikingly short raven locks and a *basso profundo* voice, who read a manuscript upon The Stupidity of Convention. Some of it startled Everett; the others present were patently bored.

"She," Baizely said, incautiously allowing his voice to rise above a whisper, "is imbued with the old, old fallacy that morality is irreconcilable with art. It's a common fault. . . ."

A buxom, amiable-looking girl wearing a cinnamon-colored blouse and jade earrings overheard him.

"You are not Genuine," she remarked. "She, on

the other hand, is Natural as God made her. Convention has deadened you to The True Beauties of Life."

She talked as if she spelled her words with capitals.

"Madam," Baizely replied sharply, although his lips were twitching with irrepressible mirth, "neither are you natural. Your people here have cultivated a so-called art which is merely a stupendous affectation. With it you try to impress others as well as yourselves."

The lady appeared interested, even faintly amused.

"At least," she conceded, "you speak Freely—which is more than I can grant most of your kind.—Then you fail to recognize any points of merit in Our Little World here?"

"Very few," Baizely replied crisply. "It seems to me that a certain obscurity of language backed by a little degeneracy of thought will pass for talent every time."

Oddly enough she seemed to find this, too, amusing.

It was only after the session was over that she condescended to explain. Everett and Baizely left, after they had each partaken of a glass of sour California claret, and she joined them as they were hurrying through the coolness of the night toward the Christopher Street station.

"Why were you laughing?" Baizely demanded suspiciously.

"The poor, dear things," she whispered. "They're

the best material for humor in the world—but, luckily, they don't realize it. I'm down here to write a series of stories for *The Neapolitan*. Well—so long!"

And she skipped away, clumsily, into the darkness. Everett turned to Baizely, almost angrily.

"Why did you bring me here, anyway?" he asked. "I thought you wanted me to do something—creative, as you call it. Then you take me amongst a crowd of artists and proceed to ridicule them."

Baizely laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"My dear Everett. I brought you here because I knew you had enough common sense to see through the foolishness of it. Those who succeed here—there are a number of them, to be sure—are successful in spite of their surroundings; not on account of them."

"Then," Everett said desperately, "you've got to go to Europe if you want to become a real artist, or writer?"

Baizely deliberated before replying. They had reached the steps of the subway.

"Not at all— If you have genuine talent, drastically original and American, you can succeed anywhere—in a Bronx apartment for instance. What I've been trying to prove to you is that if the divine spark isn't in you, cheap red wine and an avoidance of the barber won't help you to develop it."

II

The following morning, in a fit of revulsion, he

tore up his first attempts at sketching; decided once and for all that the Lord had not patterned him for an artist. A few days later a friend dropped a chance remark concerning a vacancy in the downtown offices of The United Typewriter Company. After a night of indecision, he hurried downtown and secured the job, which was in the Export Department. The salary was negligible; it barely purchased him his weekly quota of cigarettes, and paid for his carfare.

Life went on fairly smoothly after that. Spring merged into summer; open cars and straw hats appeared on Broadway, and whirling clouds of yellow dust. The United Typewriter staff began to work in shirt sleeves. Margaret Blair left for Bar Harbor.

He plodded on, grave, quiet, unsmiling. During June his mother and Emily packed up and sailed for Europe; his father remained in New York, and the two of them often dined out together during the long summer evenings. John Gail was, at this time, growing proud of his son, and felt that he had somehow gained a new sense of responsibility. But deep down within Everett, although he himself was almost unaware of it, the fires of restlessness were still smouldering.

Margaret wrote him occasionally in a round, childish hand; her letters were, for the main part, flippant, trivial. She signed herself invariably "with love," but he realized that in these enlightened days

the phrase signified little more than a spontaneous burst of good feeling towards him. . . .

III

Stoddard was in New York throughout the summer, industrious and absorbed, as usual, in his study of architecture. Everett never quite understood his younger brother—was almost, secretly, afraid of him. Stoddard was so self-contained; seemed to require no help from anyone; he was, moreover, an apparent model of virtue. This vaguely irritated Everett, who considered that he was taking life altogether too seriously. All this was changed abruptly one July night when Stoddard came to his bedroom, looking dishevelled, pale and worried.

"I've got to see you a minute, Everett," he said hoarsely, and when Everett told him to come in, he closed the door behind him with excessive caution.

"Trouble?" Everett asked, laconically.

Stoddard nodded; took a seat. His fingers beat a nervous tattoo upon the arm of the chair.

"I'm in a hell of a fix."

Everett was tremendously surprised. Such an admission from Stoddard was unprecedented.

"I've always led a pretty decent life—" Stoddard began; then stopped, his cheeks suffused with crimson.

"Go on," Everett said.

"Well—here goes. You remember Dawn Whiting—in the Manhattan Follies?"

Everett's eyes widened; he remembered Dawn Whiting, certainly, as a dizzy blonde he had once met at a Motion Picture Ball in the days when he attended such functions, and thought them splendid. Dawn, he had decided, was about as easy to handle as dynamite; he had, sensibly, determined to avoid her.

Stoddard coughed; continued with certain pitiful determination.

"I met her through Howard Morgan. That time, two weeks ago, when you and the Governor thought I'd gone to spend the week end with Lees at Lake Placid, I didn't go there at all——"

"Where did you go?"

"Atlantic City—four of us, in Morgan's car; I drove."

Light dawned suddenly upon Everett; he was dumbfounded—at this new revelation of Stoddard's complexities.

"I see. Very unofficial party—I suppose that's what you're driving at?"

Stoddard nodded; hung his head.

"Where do I come in?" Everett asked coldly.

"We skidded into a telegraph pole. Dawn broke her arm; she wants two thousand dollars or she'll sue. Morgan's broke. I don't know what to do—unless I write Mother. You know what the Governor would do——"

Everett rose, stood towering above him.

"If you ever breathed a word of this to Mother I'd wring your miserable little neck for you."

He crossed the room to a writing table, opened a drawer and produced an oblong check book.

"How much have you got?"

"Exactly nine hundred in the bank," Stoddard whined.

"Eleven hundred will cover it—you're sure?"

Everett's pen was poised in the air; his brother nodded hurriedly.

Presently Everett handed him the yellow slip of paper.

"There. Take it."

"Y-you're pretty white," Stoddard stammered, seizing it. "—Doesn't this set you back a good deal?"

Everett laughed mirthlessly.

"It's put an end to my chances of getting a new car—that's all. Now please don't say a word about this damned business again."

As Stoddard rose to go Everett laid a hand upon his shoulder, smiling grimly.

"After this, Stoddard, you'd better keep clear of that kind of thing. Fellows like you weren't cut out for it——"

After he had gone Everett lay awake for an hour pondering over the affair. Primarily, he was thankful that Stoddard had given him the opportunity of keeping it a secret. No one else need ever know; Stoddard would continue to hold an untarnished reputation; he, Everett, would still be regarded as the family's only source of worry. Curious how things

worked out. . . . There was, somehow, a certain acid yet almost humorous feeling of satisfaction in the knowledge that he had maintained Stoddard's prestige.

CHAPTER VII

I

SUMMER merged into autumn and Everett plodded on; he was dogged, persevering. He learned all there was to learn concerning the export of typewriters—or, at least, so it seemed to him. He did not love his work, nor did he actually detest it. It was, perhaps, the constant hope of promotion that kept him at it.

One afternoon in early November, the first cold day of the approaching winter, Mr. Hume, Manager of the Export Department, a pale, shrivelled little man with a skin like parchment, summoned him to his private office. The clock indicated five minutes before five; Everett placed the metal cover on the adding machine which he had been operating—his last task of the day—and followed the beckoning office boy, his heart thumping loudly. This, then, he thought, must be promotion—at last.

Mr. Hume greeted him with a nod, motioned to him to take a seat, and began to fuss among a pile of papers on his desk; presently handed him a mimeographed bulletin issued from the President's office.

It was, Everett saw, a report of a recent directors' meeting; he did not attempt to read it, but glanced, instead, enquiringly at Mr. Hume.

"You've done good work—very good work," began the little man; and then paused, for no apparent reason.

"—Yes. I may say that you've been extremely conscientious——"

He paused again; picked up a colored pencil and began toying with it nervously; a slight frown puckered his colorless brow. Everett waited, silent, motionless.

"—however, as you see by this bulletin, we've received orders to economize. The whole country is going through a critical stage . . . prices soared for a while . . . then dropped."

As if through a fog Everett heard his voice droning on. It was then that the truth seared across his brain; the reason for the interview became, of a sudden, appallingly clear.

". . . All wars have been followed by precisely such an economic situation . . . the Civil War, for instance. . . ."

"You mean," Everett said, "that you're going to fire me?"

Mr. Hume coughed delicately; drew a geometrical pattern upon his blotting paper.

"Don't put it that way, please. When things begin to adjust themselves, maybe in several months from now, we will remember you——"

"How many others are going?" Everett asked tensely.

Again Mr. Hume coughed.

"As it happens, only two at present in this department—the last men to be employed by us. That's the fairest way, of course. Others may follow. . . . As I was pointing out, history shows several remarkable parallels. Now, after the Civil War——"

Quite suddenly Everett was conscious of an infinite contempt for the dried-up little man and his historical parallels. So sure of himself, so confidently pedantic, too. . . .

"Oh, damn the Civil War," he said loudly, and left the office. Out in the narrow hallway he elbowed his way through a crowd of laughing, bantering employees. Someone called after him—offered him a lift uptown in an automobile. He did not answer.

Outside it was bitterly cold; he bent his head to the icy gale that was sweeping down Broadway, and headed for the Fulton Street subway station; his mind was in a chaotic whirl. . . .

When he reached the house he hurried up to his bedroom, slammed the door, and locked it.

He did not go down to dinner at seven o'clock; it would be difficult, he felt, to face his father—and Stoddard, who would in all probability be patronizingly sympathetic.

A few minutes before eight he decided to call up

Margaret, to tell her what had happened. He was convinced that she alone could give him the understanding sympathy which he so needed at the moment. Besides, he had only seen her once since she had returned to town; he wanted to talk over things with her. . . .

Margaret herself answered the telephone, after a long delay which made him fitfully impatient; he heard her voice, faint and sweet, just a little perturbed; he knew instinctively that she was busy, pre-occupied, but told her that he must see her.

"I can't, Everett," she said. "I'm awfully sorry—I'm going out with Hal Jones and his brother, and Edith Way."

Hal Jones, he remembered, was the man who had dined with Emily and himself on the night he had arrived from New Haven, almost a year ago. Everett had met him several times since, and had disliked him increasingly. Jones, he considered, was the most perfect specimen of a parlor snake that he knew; he had a way of worming himself into the affections of elderly matrons with his perfect manners; and yet Everett knew something of his Broadway reputation. . . .

"Cancel your date with them," he suggested. "I really must see you tonight. I'm as blue as the deuce——"

"I couldn't do that," he heard her reply, almost pleadingly. "We're going to the theatre, and supper afterwards."

He became acutely suspicious.

"All last winter you told me you weren't allowed to go out to supper places——"

It seemed to him that she hesitated unnecessarily before answering; then he heard her voice again, still gentle and pleading.

"Please be reasonable. I'll go out with you any time you say."

He became the victim of an absurd idea that now was the time to test her, once and for all. He realized that he was being utterly unreasonable, but in his mingled disappointment and anger he felt a certain bitter satisfaction in his own insistence.

"Then cut out this Jones' party," he told her, "that is—if you care a hang about me."

She answered him promptly, almost sharply.

"I told you I couldn't do that, Everett. What *has* got into you tonight——?"

He slammed up the receiver, without replying. If she would rather go out with that idiot Hal Jones, and his brother, he told himself furiously, then he had better let her go. Anyway, he knew just where he stood with her now. He was in an ungovernably bitter mood. . . .

A half an hour later he flung on his hat and coat and took a taxi down to Marly's in West Forty-Eighth Street; he would try bohemianism as an antidote to his misery, he decided.

Marly's proved to be unexpectedly crowded, noisy, thick with tobacco smoke and the odor of

greasy cooking; in a far corner a pathetic orchestra was grinding out "Madelon," and several convivial Frenchmen were singing the chorus. Someone called out his name, and at the table next to his he discovered Bertwick, Schaffer and O'Malley—all of New Haven. Under ordinary circumstances he would probably have acknowledged their greeting with a formal nod; they were none too popular, these three; brainless, coarse, uninteresting to a degree—always getting in some kind of ugly mix up . . . he had rarely troubled to associate with them at New Haven.

Tonight, however, he returned their greeting with a facetious remark and drew his chair up to their table, untidily crowded with half-empty tumblers.

Bertwick's breath was already eloquent.

II.

Margaret did not like cabarets; after the novelty of a first visit they bored her. Still, since Hal Jones and his brother proudly announced, as they left the theatre, that they had succeeded in engaging a front row table at the Luxembourg she did not feel it worth her while to protest—especially as Edith Way was the other girl in the party. Edith frankly said that she "adored" the Luxembourg, which statement Margaret found typical. Edith, she knew was unable to concentrate her attention on any particular

subject for more than sixty seconds, and the flip-pantly vagrant state of mind desirable to such parties suited her immensely; she had, moreover, a certain cleverly assumed and wholly artificial enthusiasm which her friends referred to as "pep."

Margaret's air of polite resignation cast a subtle damper over the others; conversation, after several fox trots and orangeades, waned. She ventured to glance at her black-ribboned wrist watch; Hal Jones frowned, and ordered more orangeades.

At midnight the myriad electric globes in the oval dome of the room were suddenly extinguished, to the insistent rolling of a drum; the babble of voices from a hundred tables dropped, simultaneously, to a confused murmur. An oblique, shifting ray of silver light descended from the dome, picked out from the darkness and silhouetted the figures of a man and a girl in the centre of the dancing floor; they bowed. The orchestra commenced a rhythmical tango. . . .

From the blackness somewhere behind Margaret's chair came the sound of muttering voices, the shifting of chairs, the subdued, polite whisperings of a waiter. There had been an empty table in that direction, she remembered, when they had arrived half an hour before. The voices, now above a whisper, were distinctly truculent.

"More arrivals," she said; and added casually, "They make an awful noise. One would think——"

"You've got to expect that kind of thing," Hal

Jones' eighteen-year-old brother cut in importantly, "at places like this."

Margaret, unseen in the darkness, shrugged her shoulders; turned her attention negligently to the pirouetting dancers.

The performance was presently over, and the lights were turned on; for a moment she blinked in the sudden glare, then glanced toward the newcomers at the adjoining table. There were four men—not in evening clothes; she wondered vaguely as to why they had been let in to the Luxembourg; their heads were tousled, their faces hectically flushed. One of them, his back to her, swayed slightly in his chair; he called loudly for a waiter, at the same time turning his head—it was Everett Gail.

His half-opened, bloodshot eyes rested on her vacantly for a moment; then, at the recognition of her, color ebbed slowly from his cheeks. She turned back to Hal Jones hurriedly, and attempted a light, bantering conversation. Evidently he had not seen Everett; some kind, protective instinct within her prayed that he would not. She feared there might be trouble. . . .

She felt, suddenly, a hand, hot and dry, resting upon her cool, bare shoulder, and—terrified—heard Everett's voice saying thickly:

"Come on over to my table—I want 'talk t'you."

Hal Jones glanced up in amazement; pleadingly she whispered to Everett:

"Go away, Everett, please. I'll call you up tomorrow."

He came round to the side of her chair; shook his head doggedly. A lock of his brown hair fell absurdly over his moist forehead. Hal Jones, half rising, spoke up sharply.

"Get back to your table, Gail. You're not in a fit condition to speak to Margaret."

Margaret turned white. Everett swayed forward, lunged at Hal Jones with an open palm—missed him. Two waiters, chattering in Italian, dragged Everett away. A party at the next table began whispering excitedly. The orchestra struck up a fox trot and mercifully drowned Everett's loud but ineffectual protests as he was escorted from the room. Bertwick, Schaffer and O'Malley slunk shamefacedly after him.

Margaret, lips quivering, rose from her chair.

"I think I'll go home," she said, almost inaudibly. "Will you get the car, Hal?"

Edith Way saw, with some surprise, that her eyes were bright with tears.

III

Everett, oppressed by an overwhelming sense of calamity, found his way to Bertwick's car, which had been parked in Forty-Sixth Street outside the Luxembourg, and tumbled into it. The others followed noisily.

"Where'll we go now?" Bertwick demanded. Schaffer, whose condition was appreciably nearer normal than his companions, elected to drive and took his seat at the wheel.

No one spoke until Everett, unconsciously voicing what was in his mind, murmured:

"Sick of ole N' York . . . I better leave the country . . . Europe f'r'instance . . . do me a world of good. . . ."

This struck their sense of humor; they bellowed. Then Bertwick, with sudden intoxicated gravity, turned to Schaffer:

"He wants to go to Europe. Schaffer, d'you hear me—take Mr. Gail to the steamship—im-me-diatly."

Schaffer threw in the clutch, and they shot down Broadway cheering hoarsely. At Twenty-Third Street they veered westward. Everett spoke up mildly as they jolted over the car tracks at Tenth Avenue.

"Nice of you fellows to see me off. Remember this all my life. Assure you."

Schaffer, vaguely worried, turned down West Street, trundled slowly past the International Mercantile piers which were, one and all, closed, silent, and in darkness. At last they reached a dock, smaller than the rest, the gates of which were wide open. An arc light was sputtering fiercely by the water's edge, and they could hear in the distance the rattle of a winch, the hiss of escaping steam.

"Will this do?" Schaffer asked nervously, as he applied the brakes. It was slowly dawning upon him that there was something preposterously absurd about the whole business. . . . Bertwick, who had apparently taken charge of the proceedings, stood up unsteadily; he was determined that Everett should embark for Europe that night; Everett had expressed such a desire—and he was a good fellow. . . . Nothing like helping a friend in the hour of trouble.

"Here's your dock," he said, shaking Everett. "Get up!"

Everett with unexpected promptness, climbed out of the car, swayed a little, and started in a zig-zag course toward the pier.

"Farewell," he called back sadly, and a sudden hush fell upon the others.

There was a night watchman pacing to and fro on West Street. With instinctive cunning Everett waited until the man's back was turned, then passed solemnly through the gates. The pier, in semi-darkness, was crowded with strange, fantastic shapes that loomed up eerily from the shadows; gigantic pyramids of cargo waiting to be loaded. At the harbor end of the dock he heard vague, indistinct voices. Through an open steel door he caught a glimpse of snowflakes whirling grayly down upon a placid stretch of water that glimmered in the uncertain rays of an arc light.

Of a sudden he stumbled upon a gangway,

leading steeply upwards into impenetrable darkness.

"Leaving for Europe," he murmured. "Middle of the night . . . and nobody cares."

The idea was pleasantly pathetic; he was on the verge of tears.

His progress up the gangway was slow and cautious; five minutes, perhaps, elapsed before he reached the top and found himself in the midst of a forlorn open space that was intensely dark—and bitterly cold. A few yards ahead of him he could discern a circular yellow light, gleaming through thick, misty glass. He attempted to make his way towards it. His foot tripped upon some unseen object; he fell—lay there, inert. . . .

.

Bertwick was the first of the trio to awake the following day. They had found their way, somehow, to an obscure hotel in Seventh Avenue; the three of them were in one room. Outside the sun was shining brightly, and he heard the monotonous roar of passing traffic. Fragmentary recollections of what had occurred the night before lazily penetrated his mind; he shook Schaffer at his side and woke him.

"Where's Everett Gail?" he demanded.

"Gone to Europe," said Schaffer promptly, and rolled over to sleep some more.

Bertwick grew uneasy; his mind began to work with increasing rapidity. He crossed the room and consulted a telephone book hanging on the wall; presently he found Everett's number, and lifted up the receiver. Three minutes passed before he could get an answer, and then he heard a blurred, distant voice, fretfully impatient:

"Hullo—hullo. Yes—this is Mr. John Gail's house. What do you wish?"

It was old Brixton, the butler. Bertwick hesitated; he must be careful, diplomatic. He didn't want to be involved in any trouble with Gail senior—terrible men, these lawyers.

"This is a friend of Mr. Everett Gail. I'd like to speak to him."

The answer came back with almost terrifying promptness.

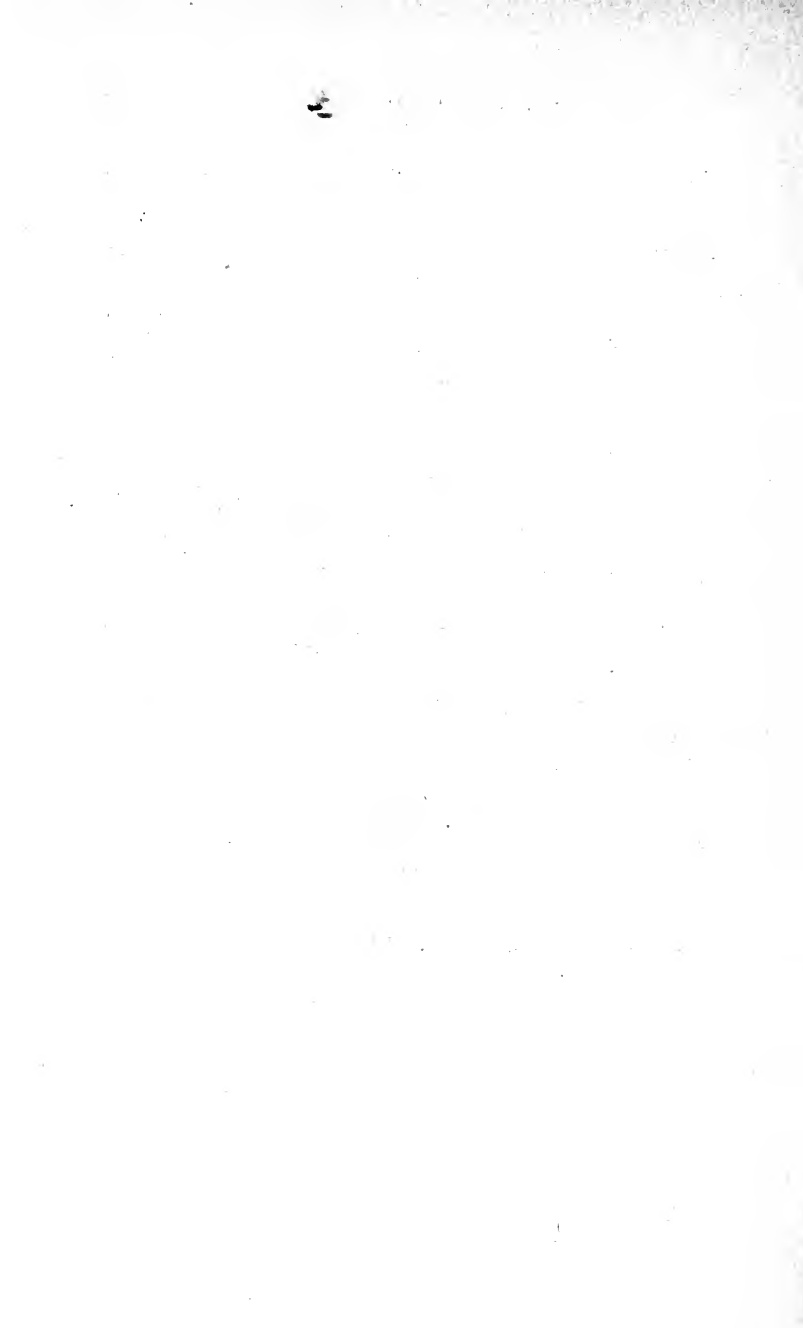
"Mr. Everett has not been in the house since he left at eight o'clock last night."

A new thought invaded Bertwick's mind.

"What time is it now, by the way?"

"Half past three, sir."

Aghast, Bertwick hung up the receiver.



Book II



CHAPTER I

I

EVERETT roused himself with a shiver, his numbed consciousness penetrated by the knowledge that something—something icily cold—was trickling slowly, insistently down his cheek; his body, at the same time, seemed to be a mass of aches; his head, he felt, was spinning round and round. . . . With an effort he opened his eyes; closed them hurriedly, momentarily blinded by the glare of an intense daylight. He waited for a minute or two, supremely conscious of a growing sense of nausea, then tried again—this time with slightly more success; his vision was confronted unexpectedly with a series of thin parallel lines—lines, lines, stretching straight as a die into distance, where they melted in a hazy obscurity. His feeling of sickness gave way to a temporary bewilderment. He tried hard to think; couldn't remember any lines like that in his bedroom . . . ridiculous lines. . . .

He came to the conclusion, presently, that he was lying upon some kind of floor; that the lines were formed by the intersection of planks that formed

the floor. Raising his head slowly he glanced upward, and discovered another astonishing thing—a vast, impenetrable wall painted white, and constructed apparently, of steel; in the very centre of the wall there was an absurd little circular window, bound in brass.

In a sudden access of terror he scrambled to his feet. The stupendous truth dawned upon him. He was on the deck of a ship.

He brushed the damp tousled locks of his hair impatiently from his eyes; took a careful step forward. In the wave of comprehension that swept over him surrounding objects swiftly assumed their normal aspect; the immense white wall, as his vision clarified, proved to be merely part of the ship's superstructure, the after-end of a deck house. He staggered to the taffrail, widened his eyes to the merciless glare, and gazed astern. Sea confronted him, everywhere; a gray, tumbling waste of waters that stretched for seeming miles and miles, to a colorless, see-sawing horizon; the whole world was rising and falling madly about him.

He became, very soon, violently sick.

Somehow, he found his way to a capstan, and leaned against it, unutterably dizzy. He closed his eyes, heedless of the opaque sheets of spray that came dashing now and again over the taffrail, suffusing him with a salty, tingling shower.

He became aware, suddenly, of someone standing near him. He opened his eyes; found himself face

to face with a veritable giant of a man, a hatless giant whose unruly, steel-gray hair was tossed about by the wind; the sleeves of his thick blue sweater, rolled up to the elbows, revealed a pair of enormous arms, mahogany-colored and ribbed with muscle. He stood regarding Everett with bright, humorous gray eyes, an expression of tolerant good nature upon his large, weather-beaten face.

"Where am I?" Everett asked; and his own voice sounded to him queerly weak and far away.

The stranger placed his hands upon his hips; answered with a counter question.

"And how in the devil's name did ye come here?"

Everett shook his head feebly.

"I don't know—last thing I remember was a row of some kind, in a restaurant uptown."

The big man actually laughed, a throaty laugh that made his red face turn even a shade redder and shook the whole of his hulking body.

"How far are we going?" Everett demanded unsteadily, making another pitiful effort to fix his eyes upon the leaping, slate-colored horizon. "—Boston?"

Again the giant laughed; then stopped short, his brow corrugated by a sudden frown.

"Hell, no!—We're bound for the Caribbean."

Vaguely frightened now, Everett asked:

"Of course you'll—get me back to New York somehow?"

The other shook his head decisively.

"I've no knowing how ye got here, but I do know that now ye're here with us ye'll stick. We've left New York some ten hours already, and we're some hundred odd knots south o' it. —We should be picking up Hatteras after nightfall."

Another man appeared at that moment, a stocky little man, with a close-clipped russet beard and a sallow, mournful face.

"Cap'n," the giant announced, stepping aside with a surprising show of deference, "I just found this young feller aboard—a stowaway, most likely."

Everett attempted to say something in his own defence, but the newcomer silenced him with a piercing glance.

"What's your name, boy?" he demanded.

"Everett Gail—sir."

The "sir" slipped out because he couldn't help it; the little man seemed, somehow, to demand the courtesy.

"How did you come aboard my ship?"

"I—I can't remember, sir."

The Captain nodded several times to himself; began to stroke his beard thoughtfully.

"Drunk—of course. You look it."

Then, reaching a decision with an altogether astonishing quickness, he added crisply:

"You'll have to get to work; I've no room aboard for loafers. You happen to be civil, so there'll be no need for irons at present—I'm short of hands,

too. —Do the work that's given you and there'll probably be no trouble."

He continued to survey Everett for a moment with a look of mild contempt; then turned to the big man at his side.

"Mallory. You'll take the lad aft and give him dunnage; he'll be needing a kit to work in. Then use him as you see fit—odd jobs on deck. And if he needs food show him where the galley is."

"Thank you," Everett blurted out, almost involuntarily. He felt grateful and, at the same time, infinitely relieved.

"Don't thank me," the Captain retorted. "You've got to be fit before you work—that's to my advantage as much as yours."

He turned on his heels and strolled away with a peculiar rolling gait that caused his rotund body to oscillate from side to side.

"Huh!" said Mallory, staring after him. "Ye caught him in good humor—lucky for you. He sure let ye off easy. The last stowaway we had aboard told the Cap'n he wouldn't work, but the old man wasn't standin' for any sass . . . had him squirmen' on his knees in a jiffy——"

He chuckled reminiscently; added:

"Come aft and we'll get your dunnage."

Everett followed as best he could, stumbled over strewn pieces of deck tackle, blocks and cleats; slipping awkwardly upon the greasy sheen of the boards. He glanced upwards, fearfully, at the

swaying masthead, the squat red funnel amidships that was wreathed in a swirling halo of acrid yellow smoke. Astern he caught a glimpse of a chalky wake curving in a gentle arc toward the far horizon; seagulls, too, hovering above the stern, screeching plaintively as they circled in the slate-colored sky.

Mallory led the way down a steep ladder to a dark, evil-smelling storeroom. He kicked open the recalcitrant door of a locker.

"This ship is the *Adventurer*," he volunteered, as he hurriedly threw him a suit of dungarees and a coarse sweater. "She's bound for Vancouver via Panama, and she carries a mixed cargo. We'll be cruisin' about the West Indies for a month or two afore we make Colon; so you'd best make yourself at home."

He took Everett, presently, to the forward well deck; supplied him with hammer and nails to mend a strip of broken hatch coaming. Everett fell to work with a certain listless determination. The hours, he discovered, dragged by with incredible slowness. . . . To his feeling of physical sickness there became added a sudden profundity of depression.

II

The crew of the *Adventurer*, he soon learned, were a mixed lot, gathered from many ports dur-

ing the ship's gypsy career. Of them all he preferred by far—and trusted only—Mallory, the First Mate—a man of composite nationality who had Irish and Swedish blood in his veins and a good share of Yankee common sense. The Second Mate, Otto Schnazel by name, was a sullen, flaxen-haired, pallid little man who eyed Everett with a supreme contempt which he did not trouble to conceal. Had Schnazel been in Mallory's place Everett felt that things would have fared badly indeed with him. As it was, Mallory ruled the deck with a certain crude, impartial justice which gave no cause for complaint. It was not Everett's fault that by the end of his first day aboard the *Adventurer* he had exchanged words with no one but Mallory; he had, he realized, little of the snob within him—was willing, even anxious to be on good terms with the crew; yet the majority of them seemed instinctively to avoid him—under Schnazel's leadership, he later on discovered. During the midday meal they regarded him distrustfully, conversed in low, monotonous tones so that he could not hear what they were saying. Being supremely self-conscious at the moment he came to the conclusion that they were discussing him, and felt considerably ill at ease.

The abrupt transition to this new and remarkable phase in his life affected him keenly. He walked about the ship as if in a dream; it seemed incredible—absurd, for him to be there; he protested to himself in vain that such things didn't happen in

real life. . . . Catching a glimpse of himself in a cracked fragment of mirror hanging on the galley door, he received a distinct shock. He looked pale and weak, and utterly miserable; his clothes were many sizes too big for him, giving him the appearance of some grotesque caricature of a sailor. Another siege of depression followed this discovery.

During the afternoon he was set to work polishing brasses on the flying bridge, which he kept up doggedly until his back seemed to be splitting and his fingers were actually numb. At five o'clock the sun burst out from behind a veil of scudding clouds and transformed the neutral-colored sea into a glittering expanse of blue; the golden warmth of the sunshine brought sudden new life to his chilled, aching body; sent the blood racing once more through his veins. The ship seemed, all at once, a brighter and cleaner thing. An indomitable, youthful optimism gradually conquered his misery, enabled him to contemplate his position with a more philosophic calm. He began to make plans. . . .

He would stay aboard the *Adventurer* for a month, perhaps two, while she slipped from island to island in the Caribbean; he would work himself into a superb condition of physical vigor, and ultimately return to New York ready to tackle the first job that came his way. Then there was Margaret—he would write her an apologetic letter; he owed her that; and he knew that she would be forgiving. . . . This would be a magnificent adven-

ture, after all, he told himself; and in his growing enthusiasm it never occurred to him that anything might happen to frustrate his plans; throughout his twenty-two years of existence he had, it so happened, been thoroughly accustomed to having things pretty much his own way.

After a supper of tepid coffee and canned fish, which he ate with a sudden reversion to his former appetite that made the rest of the crew gape, he found his way to the bunk room, a low-beamed place that reeked of oil and tar, and that indescribable smell of an old, old ship. There, under the murky, orange glow of a swaying oil lamp he curled up on the mattress Mallory had provided for him and fell swiftly into a deep, untrammelled sleep.

CHAPTER II

I

A FEW days later, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Margaret Blair was summoned to the telephone in her house; it proved to be Mrs. Gail, who enquired plaintively whether she had seen Everett "lately." Margaret frowned, surrendered herself to a moment's quick thinking; then said calmly:

"Not since Saturday night, Mrs. Gail."

She hoped that would be sufficient, but Mrs. Gail droned on with pathetic persistence. Where had Margaret seen Everett, and at what time? She wished, in fact, to have all the details. . . . The memory of that night lingered bitterly in Margaret's mind, but she determined, with instinctive loyalty, to shield him.

"He was with some friends, Mrs. Gail—men I did not know. They left the place before we did. I'm sorry, but I haven't the *remotest* idea where they went, or where he is now. Oh, I do hope you're not worried, etc., etc. . . ."

Mrs. Gail thanked her in a perfunctory manner and hung up.

Three more days passed—and then Margaret became worried. Her first thought had been that Everett, conventionally ashamed of what had happened at the Luxembourg, had decided to keep away from her until she let him know, by some means or other, that he was forgiven; this, she concluded, would be typical of him in a mood of repentance—and she was quite ready to forgive. After all, she thought, he had wanted desperately, for some reason unknown to her, to see her that night; his insistence at the telephone had been amazing . . . the stupid revel which had followed had been, perhaps, the outcome of his disappointment. She knew—or thought she knew—Everett's character fairly well by now; was, indeed, thoroughly familiar with his alternate and swift-changing moods of optimism and despair. And so, in the mingled generosity and egotism of her youthful heart she sat down and penned him a demure little note, telling him that he had better come and see her very soon.

No answer came. She was, at first, piqued; then deeply hurt. Her young pride was torn to shreds.

At a dance the following Saturday someone chanced to introduce Bertwick to her; they had supper together, and conversation drifted, pleasantly, to mutual friends—eventually to Everett. Over the coffee Bertwick, who was quick to detect her more than ordinary interest in Everett, blurted out the whole story.

"And we went down to the dock the following afternoon," he told her, "but the ship—some dinky little freighter—had sailed for the West Indies. He'll be all right, though. Probably he'll have a wonderful time—he'd like that kind of thing."

Margaret listened, frozen to a white fear, hands clenched tightly beneath the supper table.

"You're positive that he went on board—and yet you didn't try to stop him?" she demanded.

Bertwick flushed nervously.

"To tell the truth, I don't know—but Schaffer, who seems to remember more details, swears that he saw him going up the gangway."

Had Margaret lived ten years before her time she might well have attempted to deceive Bertwick as to the true state of her feelings; a nameless pride would, perhaps, have prevented her from revealing the fear that gripped her heart. As it was, she turned on him in a sudden fiery little outburst of anger; he was smiling complacently, and that infuriated her.

"If he never comes back," she said, "you'll be responsible. I should think that the three of you, in spite of your muddled brains, would have had enough sense to get him off that ship— Oh, but I wish he'd never met you that night . . . just because he was amiable, tolerant, easy-going, you dragged him down with you. And now you're laughing about it, when he might be dead for all you know!"

She rose from her chair and hurried from the supper table, leaving him to stare after her in stricken amazement. But, because she had been steeled, in her age, to play the game, she remained at the dance until after three, outwardly flippant and gay, in her heart knowing that she longed for Everett as she had never longed for anyone before; and there was a novel, bittersweet joy in the realization.

II

The influence that Schnazel exercised over the *Adventurer's* crew had all the subtlety of well-planned propaganda. Surreptitiously he dropped a remark here and there concerning Everett, insinuating gently that he was arrogant and considered himself above the rest. The crew, limited in analytical powers of their own, took what Schnazel said for granted—with the result that by the third day out Everett knew he had not a friend aboard the ship, except Mallory. At the same time Mallory fell ill from ptomaine poisoning, and writhed in his bunk with a temperature of one hundred and four. There was no doctor aboard, and the crew's well-meaning efforts at the bedside with a kit of old-fashioned remedies were, at best, clumsy and haphazard.

Schnazel took Mallory's place as First Mate; he got the daily work done—there was no denying

that—but at a price. The good-natured, easy-going spirit of the crew gave way to frowns, sullen looks, subdued profanity. At night men tumbled in their bunks worn out with fatigue, or sought to drown their troubles in fiery stuff from furtive bottles; the Captain was unaware of the change, Everett knew, for the reason that Schnazel was a fawning hypocrite before superiors. Observing the new order Everett realized, all of a sudden, the essential difference between Anglo-Saxon and Teuton methods of getting things accomplished. . . .

On the fourth day out they ran into a south-westerly gale and he learned, for the first time, the true hardships of the sea. The day dawned gray and raw; the *Adventurer* seemed to have lost what little power she had; to have become a passive, buffeted fragment in an incredible vastness of sea and sky. The horizon, flashing into view intermittently above the lathery turmoil of waters, vanished abruptly as the ship plunged her nose into the swirling trough, slid down giddily into green chasms of spume and smother, while her propeller raced helplessly in midair and her stern quivered like some living, frightened thing. . . . After the plunge, another trembling climb to the next of the endless crests, only to plunge again. . . .

Everett was on deck from sunup until sundown, his body bent to the shrilling gale as he worked. Time and again, opaqued, pinnacled mountains of gray-green water dashed over the flying bridge,

broke in impotent rage, and ran in gurgling torrents down the scuppers. The crew wore rubber boots, staggered and slipped, cursed as they went about their appointed tasks.

Everett became grim and silent—inured. Harassed hours such as these permitted no time for indulging in thoughts upon the past or future. Life resolved itself into an elementary problem; that of maintaining a precarious foothold upon a plunging, reeling world.

Throughout the dark hours the *Adventurer* wallowed drunkenly in the trough of the storm, until a copper-tinted dawn put an end to the black foulness of the night. Mallory died just before the sun climbed above the horizon.

At noon the ship was stopped, and Mallory was buried while the crew stood bare-headed and sullen in a pathetic little group upon the after well deck. Days passed before Everett could quite obliterate from his memory that picture of the dreary deck with its closely-battened hatches and rusty tackle, the knot of men gathered silently about the tarpaulin-shrouded form. Someone read a prayer aloud in a perfunctory, stumbling manner; the remains were lowered, sank beneath the waves; up forward the telegraph bell rang shrilly; the engines throbbed once more. Life and death, so remote from each other, yet so closely interwoven. . . .

Schnazel was confirmed as First Mate.

At four bells in the afternoon of the following

day, which dawned bright and clear, Everett and two others of the crew were put to work to holly-stone the decks.

He had nearly completed his task when he became aware of Schnazel and the new Second Mate, a square-headed Swede named Bergström, standing at the taffrail a few yards away from where he was toiling on hands and knees. The afternoon was sunny, with a new, springlike touch to the air—and Schnazel was, apparently, in a good humor; Everett heard him laughing gutturally with the Swede, and saw him take from his pocket a cube of chewing tobacco.

Suddenly, across the white expanse of deck not three feet from where he was working, there shot a liquid brown stream. He glanced up, frowning.

"I've just cleaned that space," he protested mildly. Schnazel, to his surprise, stepped up quickly to him.

"What's that you say?"

"I said," Everett repeated, flushing, "that I've just finished scrubbing. There'll be inspection."

"Clean it up again," said Schnazel, and spat once more.

Everett jumped to his feet; threw down his scrubbing brush.

"You can clean up your own mess!" he shouted, vibrant with anger.

The next moment he found himself lying flat

on the deck, Schnazel leering down at him. He picked himself up, dazed. Schnazel immediately sent him below—to do what was considered the meanest task on the ship.

He reappeared on deck an hour later, pale, but still defiant.

"Had enough?" Schnazel asked, as he entered the bunk room; the others looked on in silence.

Everett shook his head.

"I'm not broken yet," he muttered.

Schnazel nodded to himself; rubbed his fat hands.

"Good. You'll take on the second watch tonight."

Although he was totally unconscious of it, Everett had risen considerably in Schnazel's estimation; Schnazel was of that type which does not appreciate meekness in others. When Everett had gone he whimpered grudgingly to Bergström:

"The kid's hard to beat."

III

The night watch was a revelation to Everett. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he knew night as it really was; he was acutely aware of a vast universe—tremendous, unlimited space, unbroken by sounds or signs of humanity. . . . Millions and millions of stars above him; stars that were more vivid, seemed to possess a more imminent cosmic significance than the stars he had known at home.

The night air had a gentle quality of warmth, a languorous softness. He began to comprehend how men came to love the sea, and sought the relief it brought them from the thousand and one inquietudes of life ashore; he found himself looking back on the crowded past with a curious feeling of disgust. It seemed to him as if he were suddenly very near to God that night. . . .

At four bells the *Adventurer* entered the Mona Passage, sailed through it, and came into the Caribbean towards dawn. The new day burst forth in a perfect triumph of gold and blue; the sky a living mass of turquoise flecked with slow-moving, fleecy clouds. The pleasant warmth of early morning increased to a throbbing, breathless heat, and the sea, Everett thought, was quite the bluest thing he had ever seen.

Irregular patches of golden-brown seaweed appeared, frequently, on the crest of a lazy wave, and—now and then—the silvery flash of flying fish skimming through the sunlight just above the surface of the sea.

At the noon meal Schnazel volunteered the information, to a general audience, that the *Adventurer* would put into the harbor of Santa Palma, at the island of Esperanza, the following morning to take on sugar; after that she would, according to plans, touch at Fort de France, Martinique.

“How long will we be at Santa Palma?” Everett enquired of Bergström who was sitting next to him.

Schnazel overheard him; leaned across the table and asked morosely:

"Why such questions? Do you want to quit us?"

"I guess I will," said Everett, unconscious of the trap into which he was falling.

Schnazel flared up instantly.

"By God, you don't! We catch you trying to get away, and see what happens—huh? You come on this ship; you stick here till we get back to the U-nited States. See?"

"I'm making no promises," Everett said doggedly.

Schnazel look puzzled; he didn't see that promises had anything to do with the matter, and said so. A man's promise, according to his precepts and training, wasn't worth a tinker's dam.

"You're a queer fellow," he grunted, as he stirred his coffee.

CHAPTER III

I

As soon as he awoke in the bunk room the next morning Everett was aware that his surroundings had during the night undergone some intangible change, the precise nature of which he could not immediately grasp. He stood up, rubbing his eyes, and discovered that the bunk room was already deserted, the rough brown blankets folded neatly upon the mattresses. Presently there reached his ears the clatter of a steam winch on the deck above him, and a prolonged rattle of anchor chains. He realized all at once that the ship was no longer in motion, and the disconcerting immobility of the floor beneath his feet, after seven days of ceaseless, rhythmic rolling, made him feel curiously unsteady.

He dressed hurriedly and, just before leaving the room, took his pocketbook from where he had carefully hidden it beneath his mattress; it contained, he knew, exactly one hundred dollars—the most precious hundred dollars he had ever possessed. He hastened up the steep ladder to the deck, and at the uppermost step halted abruptly—spellbound.

He had come upon the deck during that brief silent moment that precedes dawn. The *Adventurer* was lying motionless in a wide, crescent-shaped harbor; the water was unrippled, mirror-like, veiled in a luminous haze; it was, he thought, as if the ship were floating, pendulous, in air. . . . In the east a gray sheen was spreading across the sky and the horizon appeared, margined with the faintest perceptible crimson glow. At the tip of a moss-covered peninsula that jutted seawards, perhaps a quarter of a mile to the east of the ship, he could discern dimly the frowning bulk of an ancient Spanish castle; bastions and moats, and crenelated walls, dark and crumbling with decay. He crossed the deck slowly to the starboard rail, and through the gauze of mist saw Santa Palma, mystic and unreal in the glimmering half-light before dawn . . . tinted houses in pastel shades of red and blue and yellow, rising terrace upon terrace from the harbor's edge; church towers framing massive bells; clustered palms struggling upwards between the crowded houses in vivid patches of green; above the town a curving amphitheatre of wooded slopes. Over all there hung a profound stillness.

And then, suddenly, the sun climbed above the sea; the veil of mist vanished with magic swiftness; day came. A cart rattled across the cobblestoned quays that lined the water's edge; it was the first land-made sound he had heard in a week, and it was like music to his ears. An instant later bells

in an old pink cathedral chimed the hour of seven; and all Santa Palma was awake.

A dory came drifting leisurely across the harbor, and as it neared the *Adventurer* Everett saw that it was laden to the gunwales with a cargo of fruit; a lean bronze man, wearing a hat of soft-brimmed straw, but otherwise practically naked, wielded the sluggish oars; Everett thought humorously of Adam in a panama. . . . The craft came close to the *Adventurer*, passed impertinently beneath her blunt bows.

At that moment Schnazel loomed up.

"Go forward," he bellowed, "and get to work at the hatches. You ain't here for your —— pleasure."

A wave of revulsion swept over Everett; the ship was all at once a prison; he detested the very sight and smell of her decks. He speculated, coolly, upon his obligations. After all, he had paid for his passage—and more—he considered, by the work he had done. He had been the butt of Schnazel's jests, the target for his ill-humor. The transaction was honorably completed, he decided. They were now quits.

A slow, good-natured smile spread over his face.

"But I'm through with all that, Schnazel," he said, and kicked off his shoes. He went over the taffrail in a white streak.

The plunge was less of a shock than he had anticipated; he discovered that the water was agreeably warm. He struck out for the dory, scarcely fifty

yards away, confident that he could reach it easily in spite of the hindrance of his clothes; he had always been considered a fairly good swimmer at home.

Behind him, aboard the *Adventurer*, he heard confused shouting.

Presently he was alongside the dory; he gripped the gunwale, climbed aboard, and fell asprawl in the bows, with the cargo of fruit tumbling madly about him.

"Mother of God!" said the *barquero*, and stared at him as if he were some mythological figure risen from the sea.

Complex events were to be the ultimate result of Everett's arrival at Santa Palma—but, as it happened, only a nude little brown boy fishing from the end of a jetty saw him when he stepped ashore, barefooted and dripping, and he was far too intent upon his own affairs to give the matter any attention.

II

He basked in the sun upon a sea wall of pressed shells while his clothes dried. He seemed to be in a new world. . . . All along the quay native barquantines were anchored, so close together that he could barely glimpse the harbor waters through a tangled forest of masts and rigging and brown sails. Men were gathering in little groups upon the cobblestoned space of the *Marina* before him—lazy-look-

ing fellows wearing hats of soft straw and linen suits that long ago had been white, smoking minute *cigarillos* and chatting amiably together.

An old woman with a wrinkled face, brown as a Brazil nut, lighted a charcoal stove; began to fry greasy cakes over the glimmering flame. There appeared, too, a fruit-seller carrying an enormous basket of red bananas and gray-green mangos. A trio of sweating negroes, limbs gray with dust, came presently from the outskirts of the town leading produce-laden mules. The quays were soon alive, crowded with humanity; he saw that it was market day in Santa Palma.

Color was everywhere. He liked especially the pink and yellow bandannas of the market women; their gaudy cotton dresses. In the jargon of voices which for a while bewildered him Spanish predominated, but once or twice he heard some suave negro gentleman trying to strike a bargain in the slurred, lipping French of Martinique. . . . He began, suddenly, to feel pangs of hunger. As he slid down from his perch on the sea wall a deep-throated roar came reverberating across the harbor, and he turned to see the *Adventurer* swinging her nose seaward. Five minutes later the last link that lay between him and his homeland had melted away in the sunlit sea.

He breakfasted pleasantly enough on oranges, then left the *Marina* to saunter up the first street that came into view; it was steep and narrow; and led, apparently, to the upper town. Finding the sidewalks

altogether inadequate he followed the example of other pedestrians and trod the cobbles; except for the market-bound mule herds laden with sugar-cane there was little traffic. He was amused by the more or less fantastic names of the open-fronted shops that lined the street—El Rubi, Las Portas del Sol, El Paraíso . . . gaudily painted little places displaying, under striped awnings, the cheapest kind of merchandise.

The clamor of the streets was incessant, a confused medley of jingling mule bells, shouts from the muleteers, melodious cries from the venders of coco-water and pastry who were stationed at every street corner. And over the whole vivid scene the sun shone, dazzling, pregnant with an ever-increasing heat.

He came eventually to a park-like space, planted with tamarind trees—the Plaza Nacional it was called. Beyond the trees there stood a large but unpretentious cream-colored building, which he later on came to know as the *Intendencia*, the hub of Santa Palma's municipal affairs. And a little farther on, the Cathedral, its pink plaster walls flaked and peeling with the wear of centuries. The sun had, by this time, climbed high in the heavens, was beating down upon the streets with a merciless intensity to which he had not yet become acclimatized; he felt, of a sudden, unwontedly weary, and it was with a considerable sense of relief that he discovered a public bench in the cool shade of the tamarinds.

III

He was not alone on the bench. A young man was there, a dapper little man clad in a straw-colored pongee suit, mauve shirt and collar, white tennis shoes; his face was bronzed, clean-cut intelligent-looking. He was smoking a cigarette, blowing aloft an occasional smoke-ring with an air of pleased accomplishment. After a while he tossed the cigarette away and allowed his dark eyes to rest on Everett in frank, unconcealed curiosity.

It occurred to Everett for the first time that morning that his own appearance was sufficiently peculiar to attract attention; he had forgotten that he was still wearing his makeshift sailor rig—the rough blue sweater and wide, flapping trousers; moreover his feet were bare, and he was hatless. He made a mental note to purchase clothes as soon as possible, a white linen suit and panama, such as seemed to be the almost universal costume in Santa Palma. Partly to cover his confusion at the stranger's scrutiny he tried to light one of his own cigarettes, but both tobacco and matches were damp and useless. Then, to his surprise, a gold cigarette case was thrust before him.

"Thank you," he said, and helped himself.

"You are an American?" the little man enquired presently, in English with an accent that was almost faultless.

Everett nodded. In a spirit of caution he decided

not to be drawn into conversation about himself; but the stranger proved to be unexpectedly talkative, moved closer to him.

"And how do you like Santa Palma?"

Everett said politely that it was a beautiful town, and continued to puff at his cigarette. There ensued several minutes of silence, until it dawned upon him that here at least was an opportunity to gain some much-needed information.

"I'd like to know," he ventured, "the name of a good hotel in Santa Palma."

The other hesitated before replying, then shrugged his shoulders.

"There are none that are really good— However, I shall give myself pleasure in conducting you to one that is clean and respectable. Personal, I 'ave never lived in it, though. I, myself, am residing with Don José Rodriguez at the Casa Azul."

This latter piece of information, Everett thought, was volunteered with a certain inexplicable show of pride. And then, as he said nothing, the stranger repeated:

"Don José Rodriguez—you know of 'im, of course? Everybody in Santa Palma knows Don José."

"I've only been here a few hours," Everett explained.

"Ah!" said the young man. "I understand. But before long you will doubtless hear much of this person."

He rose languidly from the bench.

"Come. I show you the Hotel Venus, the best I know. I am glad to be of the assistance to you; I like Americans because they are progressive. Don José and I," —he tapped his chest with an absurd gesture of importance—"stand for progress in this republic of Esperanza."

He led the way up a precipitous, narrow street, and after five minutes walking they came to a rambling old wooden building, each floor of which was surrounded by a wide, shady balcony.

"That," said the young man, indicating it with a slender, bejewelled hand, "is the Hotel Venus."

He bowed ceremoniously, and went on his way.

In this informal fashion began Everett's strange acquaintance with Vlasco Corcovado.

CHAPTER IV

I

THE Hotel Venus, run by Madame Baptiste, an old Frenchwoman who had migrated to Santa Palma from Marseilles years before Everett was born, was quite the quaintest place he had ever been in. His bedroom, opening upon a balcony that overlooked a shady garden of mango trees, had no windows—only a pair of shutters. Blue was the predominating color of the hotel; the rickety iron cot in the corner of his room was painted blue; the walls were tinted a delicate azure. Over his bed there hung a faded lithograph of Le Petit Caporal in a frowning, bellicose mood.

It was a drowsy afternoon. In the garden beneath the glossy, green-black foliage of the mango trees a cat was sleeping, stretched out in an attitude of complete abandon; the air was heavy with heat, filled with the soft drone of insects. Something of the profound languor of the tropics slowly pervaded him; he lay down upon his bed, was soon asleep.

When he awoke it was past six o'clock. In the cool of the evening he strolled down to the street of

shops, and purchased two linen suits and a wide-brimmed hat of pliant straw. He returned to the hotel, bathed and changed; descended the easy flight of tiled steps that led to the dining room. Here he discovered Madame Baptiste hovering at the end of a long *table d'hôte* table, keeping an anxious eye upon a half dozen lemon-colored serving boys. One side of the room, bounded by imitation marble columns, was completely open and faced the garden. Through the twilight shadows he caught a glimpse of the kitchen, where Martinique cooks with shining black faces were preparing dinner. . . . He found the evening meal strange but palatable, and liked especially the great platter of silvery Caribbean whitebait, cooked to a turn, which Madame called *tri-ti-ri*.

He wandered down to the Plaza Nacional after dinner, to discover a military band clad in green coats and white duck trousers playing operatic airs with a certain verve that almost compensated for its atrocious instruments. All Santa Palma seemed to be there, sauntering leisurely beneath the tamarind trees. He found a crowded bodega with tables spread in the arcade beneath the *Intendencia*, and sat down to enjoy the music, the starlit coolness of the evening, the gay, chattering crowds. A pretty, sloe-eyed girl sold him pungent cigarettes that gripped his throat when he smoked them, and the waiter served him black coffee in a tall, narrow glass.

He had been seated but a few minutes when some-

one sat down at a vacant table next to his, caught his eye and bowed; he saw that it was his acquaintance of the morning.

He enquired whether Everett had found the hotel comfortable, and there followed a polite, desultory conversation. Presently Everett summoned the waiter; the little man suggested *cognac*, which, when it was brought, proved so fiery that Everett was unable to drink it.

"No doubt," his acquaintance remarked, "you prefer good Scotch. Alas! There is none to be had in Esperanza—except, of course, in the house of my friend Don José. There is a man who has everything worth having!—even an automobile, the only one in Esperanza. Some day, I hope, it may be your pleasure to meet him."

"Tell me about him," Everett said, becoming interested in this mysterious personage to whom the little man referred with such persistence.

"Well, he is—how you say it—the most powerful man in all this republic of Esperanza. It is my good fortune to be his secretary. He lives in the Casa Azul—that big blue house which looks upon the harbor; you noticed it, perhaps?"

Everett confessed that it had escaped his observation.

"But that," cried the little man, "is inconceivable! It is the finest house in the West Indies"—it seemed to Everett that the fellow was forever talking in superlatives—"it was built by a comrade of

Ponce de Leon in the year fifteen hundred and forty. A ver' beautiful house indeed."

"Is Don José, then, the President of this republic?" Everett asked casually.

The other, for some unaccountable reason, appeared to be disconcerted at the question.

"N-no. Eduardo Pinar is President—*viejo loco!* But one of these fine days Don José will be President. And then——"

He waved his glass in the air, at the same time allowing his voice to rise to an incautious loudness:

"—And then Esperanza will become a great nation!"

Two solemn, elderly men at a nearby table glanced at him and frowned. His acquaintance, Everett noticed, averted his head quickly.

"Those are government officials," he muttered. "I talk too much. It is a fatal habit—eh?" He changed the conversation adroitly. "—You are staying here long?"

"I don't know," Everett answered truthfully.

"Do you speak Spanish? Everyone should learn Spanish."

Everett told him that he had taken up Spanish in college; that he hoped to perfect himself in the language while in Esperanza.

"You are here on business?" the Esperanzan persisted. Everett, in a spirit of caution, said non-committally:

"Perhaps I'll find some."

"I think," his acquaintance remarked after a pause, "that it is time we introduced ourselves." Whereupon he produced a visiting card, on which was elaborately engraved:

Señor Vlasco Corcovado
Casa Azul. Santa Palma.

Everett told him his name; Concovado was immediately interested.

"Are you a relation, then, of the well-known John Gail—the *Americano* who 'as purchased all the Buénavista sugar plantations in Cuba during the War?"

"I'm his son," Everett replied, considerably astonished. "How did you happen to know of that?"

"It is part of my business as Don José's secretary to keep *au courant* with West Indies affairs; it is but natural that news of such a big sugar deal reached Esperanza, and Don José himself grows sugar——"

He broke off abruptly, surveying Everett with patent suspicion.

"I believe," he mused, "that you 'ave really come to Santa Palma on the business for your father. If that is so, you will do well to give me of your confidence; no man can make the success in Esperanza without the good will of Don José."

"I'm here purely for my own pleasure," Everett

asserted, exhibiting a first trace of annoyance at the man's inquisitiveness.

It was after ten when they parted. Before returning to his hotel Everett lingered for a while in the Plaza Nacional, mingling with the dense crowds that promenaded beneath the tamarinds. It was a colorful, tropical panorama that unfolded itself before his vision that night, and he found it at once strange and beautiful.

II

He sent, the next morning, an impulsive, reassuring cable to those at home, in which he stated his intention of staying for some time in the West Indies; he felt that he at least owed them that. . . . He passed the day exploring Santa Palma; revisited the harbor, to be entertained by native boys diving gracefully for copper pennies; climbed the palm-fringed height of Santo Cerro at the back of the town and gazed inland upon mile after mile of fertile undulating hills, pallid green against the deep blue sky.

The cathedral chimes were booming the hour of nine when he returned to the Plaza Nacional from his wanderings. Opposite the arcade of the *Intendencia* he found himself, suddenly, in the midst of a gathering crowd. Making his way through the throng he discovered the ludicrous cause of the excitement. In the very middle of the asphalted space before the *Intendencia* there stood a worn and

battered automobile of an obsolete American pattern; a diminutive negro in a white uniform was cranking the engine furiously, with no appreciable result.

In the tonneau of the car sat a tremendous man with a Van Dyke beard; his features were heavily aquiline, tanned; his hair tinged with streaks of gray. A handsome, even imposing figure, Everett thought, in his immaculate white clothes, black sombrero, a great scarlet flower at his buttonhole; he had about him an indefinable suggestion of power, an appearance of ease and well-being indicative of a man who had made his mark in the world. The stolid, gaping crowd seemed to irritate him; he leaned forward and whispered something to the little negro, who valiantly continued his efforts to start the car. Everett at that moment recalled certain words of his acquaintance, Corcovado: ". . . he owns an automobile, the only one in Esperanza."

Then this must be the great Don José.

He gazed at the man with keener interest, then at the car. In a whimsical mood he edged his way through the crowd, strode up to the car, and without a word to its occupant lifted the hood. A hurried examination—he was instinctively clever at mechanics—revealed a minor defect in the carburation, which he was swiftly able to adjust. He then signalled to the gaping negro who dubiously gave the crank another turn; the car instantly came to life, throbbing and trembling from stem to stern.

As Everett started back toward the crowd the big man stood up in the tonneau and hailed him with an imperious wave of his arm.

"That was very clever," he said in Spanish. "Where did you learn about automobiles?"

Everett replied, summoning what Spanish he knew, that he had driven cars in America ever since he could remember.

"So!" said the big man, and twirled his great moustache fiercely. Then, in English, added:

"Alonzo, here—he knows nothing about the automobile, as you can see. And I cannot get a chauffeur in this place."

"Don't you drive yourself?" Everett asked innocently.

The big man started back, almost as if Everett had struck him.

"I?" he boomed, tapping his vast chest with a gold-headed cane. "I—Don José Rodriguez drive the automobile? *Carramba!* You are making sport of me that you suggest this monstrous thing—eh?"

And he laughed, a deep, rumbling laugh that shook his great body.

"Here—" he said, moving to one side of the car. "You appear to be a young man of intelligence; I must have a conversation with you. Jump in. It is my wish. We will go for a little drive."

There was something almost regal in the way he said "it is my wish," Everett thought. However, he obeyed laughingly.

A moment later the car left Plaza and turned up a narrow, winding street that climbed toward the heights above the town. Don José turned to him, offering an enormous cigar.

"How is it that you, an American, are in Esperanza?" he enquired. "I do not believe there are a dozen of your countrymen upon the island."

"Accident, more than anything else," Everett told him. "I went on board a ship to—well—to get a change of scene. The ship came to Santa Palma, and I left it."

Don José nodded several times; puffed hard at his own gigantic cigar.

"Ah! You came to have the adventures—eh?"

Everett frowned. He had a suspicion that this big man might prove too keen an analyst to please him. Don José saw the frown, and roared good-naturedly.

"You are very young, I see. Now tell me—You think of working in Esperanza? No real *Americano* is contented unless he works; isn't it so?"

"I might work," Everett conceded, "if I found something to interest me—but, then, I don't have to while I'm here, unless I find a suitable job."

Don José seemed to find this amusing.

"Of course. I understand. You are a *caballero*, and you do not wish that I should mistake that. Well, my young man, I could see that at once. I know something of human nature. However, as you are here and can be of the service to me, I make

you an offer. This damn nigger—"—he nodded toward the chauffeur—"he knows nothing. Every day four, five, six time perhaps, we are estopped by some strange sickness of this automobile—and he never knows what is the matter. So I, Don José, principal planter and renowned citizen of Esperanza, am obliged to sit in the car like a—what you call it—dummy, while he works to discover the cause of the estoppage. And then the people of the town begin to laugh. You see, in that way a *caballero* will lose considerable of his dignity—eh?"

Everett repressed a smile.

"What do you want me to do?"

Don José's voice became suavely soft, diplomatic.

"I want that you should drive this car for me. Listen— It will be kept clean by my *sirvientes*; all you will do is to drive me about. I will not call you my chauffeur, for that, perhaps, offends your dignity—I will call you my—my——"

He paused a moment, pulling his beard thoughtfully; then broke into a vast smile that revealed gleaming rows of white teeth.

"I will call you my automobile engineer. How is that?"

By this time the car had left the straggling outskirts of Santa Palma, was speeding along a country road far above the twinkling lights of the town. Everett leaned back comfortably in his seat.

"What salary would I get?" he asked whimsically.

Don José stared at him.

"Eh? It is not enough honor to live in the Casa Azul, and to be the entrusted assistant of Don José? —*Dios!* This young man is hard to please!"

Detecting a humorous twinkle in his eye, Everett answered politely:

"It would be very delightful to live at the Casa Azul, and all that—but, after all, I couldn't work for nothing."

It was the first time in his experience that another man had openly evinced a desire to secure his services, and he was determined to take full enjoyment out of the situation. The Esperanza's colossal conceit had not in the least impressed him; he was, as a matter of fact, considerably amused by it.

"Well—" Don José said, with a sudden air of munificence, "suppose that I should offer you thirty Esperanza dollars by the month?"

Everett, aware that the monetary standard of Esperanza was different from that prevailing in the United States, realized that the big man had made what he considered a handsome offer.

"Make it fifty," he replied promptly, "and I'll accept."

To his surprise Don José agreed willingly, displaying yet another side of his complex character.

"Gentlemen cannot dispute over matters of money," he said with a magnificent gesture. "—And now, where are you living, that I may escort you home?"

Everett told him, adding:

"Your secretary, Corcovado, recommended the hotel."

Don José raised his eyebrows sharply.

"So? You have already made his acquaintance? He is a useful young man, that Corcovado; he has my personal affection and esteem. I entrust him with the most delicate of secrets——"

His brow clouded for an instant.

"If I have fault to find, it is perhaps only because he talks a little too much. But he is improving—yes, he is improving." His voice trailed off into silence as he became absorbed in some obscure process of thought. Everett found himself speculating blankly as to what delicate secrets Don José might possess. He was convinced, suddenly, that this big man, in spite of his fripperies, his laughable conceits, had a more serious aspect to him. Outwardly, perhaps, he would appear a fastidious gentleman of leisure, one who existed purely to enjoy the luxuries and finer pleasure of life. And yet—and yet Everett was perfectly sure that there were other, deeper things. . . . Beneath his blatant superficialities, one felt, irresistibly, the man was eager, striving, tremendously ambitious. . . .

At the door of the Hotel Venus Don José left him, after much bowing and handshaking. It was understood that Everett was to present himself at the Casa Azul on the following day—to take up his duties as automobile engineer on the private staff of Don José Rodriguez.

The car disappeared in a cloud of dust up the moonlit street, and Everett climbed to his little blue bedroom. The future, he concluded hopefully, held interesting possibilities.

CHAPTER V

I

AWAY back in the days when Drake and Hawkins and Furbisher cruised the Spanish Main, striking terror in the hearts of Spaniards who had settled in the palm-treed isles of the Caribbean; when Esperanza was a colony of planters, and Santa Palma a gay, prosperous fragment of Barcelona transplanted to an emerald setting, the Valencian family of Rodriguez migrated there. Don Juan Rodriguez, head of the clan, was a grand old man with a long white beard, an aristocratic walk, and a terrible eye. He gradually acquired acres and acres of plantations—tobacco, and sugar, and coffee—and because he bowed to the authority of no man, worshipped God and scorned the devil, the Esperanzans created him the first Governor of Esperanza. His son Don Mario Rodriguez succeeded to the governorship at his father's death, by common consent, thus establishing a species of dynasty. No one protested—indeed, they dared not, nor did they have the desire, for the Rodriguez were aristocrats to the core, and although they ruled the colony with an iron hand they were eminently just to all.

It was the Rodriguez money that built the famous *Camino Real* across the one hundred and thirty kilometers of island from Santa Palma on the northern coast to the southern port of Los Barrios; it was the Rodriguez fleet of galleons, with their azure and gold house pennants, that helped to make Esperanza one of the richest colonies in all the Caribbean, for they plied throughout the year between Santa Palma and the mother country, sailing eastward with their holds full of sugar and tobacco and tropical fruit, returning toward the setting sun laden to the bulwarks with Spanish gold. . . . But as in the case of so many great families, there came at last a flaw in the Rodriguez chain. When Don Mario died during the yellow fever scourge of 1870, his son, Juan the Second, seized the governorship of Esperanza, in accordance with tradition. This man proved to be a weakling; he possessed neither the broad vision of his antecedents, nor their inherent sense of justice; and to compensate for his weakness he was obliged to surround himself with unscrupulous followers, who bled the colony to fill their own coffers. The Esperanzans rose eventually in revolt, shot Juan the Second in the garden of the family house, the Casa Azul, one gray dawn; and promptly established a republic. His wife, a fine Castilian aristocrat, died of a broken heart, leaving behind a sister, and little José, aged ten. Spain, having at that time her own troubles elsewhere, merely sighed and left Esperanza to her destinies.

For a few more years Esperanza flourished, then gently subsided into that attitude of sleepy decay that already characterized many of her neighbors. Presidents came and presidents went; political parties grew up, mushroom-like, overnight, to be swept into oblivion at dawn by some new group with newer ideas; there were Nationalists, Democrats, Republicans, Royalists—even Socialists; but not one of them could revive Esperanza's lost position in the world, or regain those halcyon days when Santa Palma's harbor was crowded with the ships of nations.

Thus, little José Rodríguez grew up, steeped in the traditions of his magnificent ancestors by an old hag of an aunt who lived in the past, and wept every night when she thought of the glorious days gone by. José was a proud little boy, and became a still prouder young man. He lived all alone with his aunt in the Casa Azul, the great blue house overlooking Santa Palma harbor, which the rebels in a whim of mercy had left untouched. The aunt died, muttering mystic curses upon the heads of the vile *Republicanos*; and José was left alone. At the age of nineteen he insisted that he be called Don José by his inferiors, in memory of the sleeping great, and in spite of the fact that titles had long since been abolished upon the island. The Esperanzans, good-natured and careless in their new-found liberty, consented to address him as Don José because it seemed to appease him, and because it did

not matter to them what a solitary, proud young man chose to call himself. They regarded him as a pleasant nonentity, entitled perhaps to a certain degree of respect because of the benefits their country had derived from his ancestors. In rating him as a limpet the Esperanzans made a tremendous mistake, for in the big black eyes of that lonely youth there burned the fires of an unquenchable, irresistible ambition, and in his finely-shaped head there was a mind clear-visioned and active, that rose to heights of which the popinjays in power at the *Senado* never dreamed. . . .

II

José Rodriguez went to college in the United States for three years, following his aunt's death, in order that he might learn law and languages and something of the great world beyond Esperanza. He ceased to think provincially; became a broad-minded cosmopolitan. It was not until his thirtieth year that, after touring the world, he settled down once more at the Casa Azul and devoted himself to the upkeep of the few Rodriguez plantations the rebels had left him—he still termed them, in his mind, rebels, although Esperanza had now been a republic for twenty years and its fifteenth president had been elected.

The Spanish-American War he regarded with mingled feelings; at first he resented the Cubans'

defection, just as his aunt had resented Esperanza's throwing off of the Spanish yoke—but when he saw, in later years, Cuba rising miraculously to the lead of the West Indies, growing prosperous, clean and beautiful under the influence of the United States, he longed for similar benefits for his own country. It was at this period, during his forty-first year, that Don José first conceived his idea magnificent, which was to make Esperanza the leading power of Latin America. The idea took root, grew in his fertile brain; became infinitely complex and detailed. Meanwhile he went about his business, silent and dignified, never uttering a word to any man of what was in his mind, knowing full well that he must wait.

His was a complex character. From long centuries of ancestral dominion he had inherited a certain intolerance for the uneducated masses—but his American education, his travels abroad, had tempered this intolerance to such a degree that he eventually acquired that ability to mix on the friendliest terms with all types and conditions of men which is invaluable to the politically ambitious. For democracy itself he had not, personally, the slightest use, but he was shrewd enough to know that in this enlightened century democracy was a watchword, and a slogan, shouted by those in tottering power as a sop to discontented proletariats. He realized that if ever Esperanza were to regain her pristine power it must be under a government

at least cloaked with visionary ideals. He was not, in the usual sense of the word, a reactionary; progress was, perhaps, the only thing in the world that evoked his admiration. He liked the feverish acceleration lent to existence by the advent of automobiles, telephones and telegraphs . . . but if these things were to find their way to Esperanza he wished to control them all. If fire and sword were no longer able to rule the island, he told himself, then capital must. And thus this proud descendant of hard, bitter Spanish grandees felt the craving for power growing stronger within him year after year. Fully aware of his own capabilities, he had a superb contempt for those who temporarily guided Esperanza's destinies.

The Great War touched Esperanza but little. A pro-German party cropped up amongst the coffee exporters, to be overwhelmed at the elections by the Republicans, whose leaders were pro-American. Old Eduardo Pinar who had been President since 1913—the longest term in the history of the republic—was re-elected, and publicly avowed Esperanza's eternal friendship for the United States; the Star Spangled Banner was played every Thursday night in the Plaza Nacional. . . . Don José, on the other hand, in spite of the benefits of his American education was not at all pro-American; he did not dislike Americans as individuals, but he had a secret fear gnawing at his heart that if any foreign interference were to come when his plans

were ripe that interference would come from the United States.

"The Monroe Doctrine," he would say to Corcovado, as they sat planning tremendous things over their coffee. "Bah!—It is not for the liberty of the hemisphere that they proclaim it. In theory it is beautiful; in practice it paves the way for a second British Empire. . . ."

Like all of his kind he was suspicious of altruism in any man or nation; even the example of Cuba's treatment failed to convince him. A delegation of young Porto Ricans, fired with an obscure desire for independence, came to visit him at Santa Palma and sought his support; but he was far too clever to openly commit himself to such a cause. He made a speech to them containing the vaguest expressions of sympathy, and despatched them back to Porto Rico where they eventually discovered that they had gained nothing.

He knew the value of biding his time. For fifteen years he had waited; said nothing. He enlarged his plantations, became presently one of the richest men in Esperanza. He never spoke to a single member of the government, and avoided all dealings with them. They, in their turn, resented his aloofness but were powerless to act against him, for here was a living example of what a law-abiding citizen should be.

In the autumn of the year nineteen hundred and nineteen, one Erik Tegel arrived in Santa Palma

and went immediately to the Casa Azul, where he laid before Don José certain interesting proposals. It was then, only, that the silent machinery of the great plan began to operate. The arrival of Everett Gail in Esperanza, months later, was to furnish an additional and minor piece of mechanism to that machinery, although he himself for a long time failed to realize it.

III

Early in the afternoon of the day following his meeting with Don José Everett arrived at the Casa Azul.

The house stood, four square to the winds, upon a promontory that formed the western margin of Santa Palma's harbor. It was a square, solid old mansion with arabesqued windows cleft at regular intervals through its thick walls; the color of it, a pale, coquettish blue, seemed, somehow, in odd contrast with the chaste severity of its design. Between the house and the road, which came winding up from Santa Palma like a white thread through the jade green of plantations, there was a rather formal little garden of coconut palms, bamboos, and narrow, pebbly paths. At the back of the house, and surrounding the garden too, there rose a crenelated wall of white plaster almost smothered in a cascade of scarlet bougainvillea. Beyond this wall Everett caught a glimpse of another house, a

low-roofed villa sheltered by the wavering foliage of palms.

His first day at the Casa Azul passed quietly. Corcovado, who welcomed him, escorted him to his bedroom. It was just such a room, Everett thought, as one would expect to find in the house, with its flooring of vivid blue tiles; the light rattan furniture; the great archway of a window, glassless, and jalousied from the flood of sunshine.

He spent the afternoon in his room, reading a paper-covered novel which Corcovado lent him. Don José, it appeared, was remaining in his study, occupied with a quantity of correspondence. Everett, as he read, could hear a typewriter clicking methodically from behind some closed doors at the end of a cool, dark corridor; he found himself wondering as to what kept Don José so infinitely busy throughout the hot, listless hours of the afternoon. It was all very quiet and peaceful. In the garden beneath his window the palm fronds yielded with a lazy stir, now and then, to the faintest breath of a wind. Through a window, across the passage from his bedroom, he could see the Caribbean, placid, somnolent, like a molten mirror in the afternoon sun. A single brown-sailed schooner was lying inert, helpless, upon the glassy surface. . . .

His supper, brought to his room by a taciturn Dominican serving boy, he ate alone. For the first time, perhaps, since he had set foot in Santa Palma

a sense of loneliness pervaded him. He retired early, from sheer boredom, but lay awake for long hours in his fragile bed trying to decide whether he had made a mistake in accepting Don José's offer; he had no complaint whatever to make, he felt, concerning the treatment that so far had been accorded him—nevertheless, the sense of overwhelming isolation persisted . . . it occurred to him, almost irrelevantly, that it would be a difficult thing indeed to make his escape, should he ever desire it, against Don José's will. Then, too he was inclined to believe that something complex, intriguing, of gigantic proportions, was being planned in this vast, silent house. The typewriter continued its remorseless song far down the corridor, and grew upon his irritation. The sound of it, at last, turned his thoughts to certain offices on Broadway—and, in turn, to his own home. He dismissed impatiently a rising pang of nostalgia, and tossed about uneasily in his bed.

Some hours later, as he was about to fall asleep, the sound of a woman's voice, dreamy with distance and caressingly soft, drifted in through the open archway of his window; but he was at the time too drowsy to speculate upon it.

CHAPTER VI

I

DON JOSE sent up word early the next morning that he would require the car for a trip across the island to the southern coast, and Everett, glad of relief from a prospect of protracted inactivity, dressed with a feeling of pleasurable anticipation. He had already observed enough of Esperanza's climatic conditions to realize that only a relentless effort at physical and mental mobility would prevent him from slipping into that condition of lassitude and indifference which had, apparently, conquered most of the island inhabitants.

At nine o'clock, promptly, he was waiting at the door of the house. Don José appeared a few minutes later, somewhat nervous and preoccupied. He nodded almost curtly to Everett as he climbed, with surprising agility, into the back of the car. He was dressed, it seemed to Everett, in an elaborate manner; a suit of white flannel patterned with a hairline of blue; a yellow silken scarf; a blue flower this time at his lapel. Corcovado, lithe, quick-moving, nervous too, took the seat beside Everett.

"We are going," he announced, "to the town of Los Barrios—across the island. I trust that there is plenty of fuel with us."

Everett, nodding, threw in the clutch and they trundled down the sinuous road toward the roofs of Santa Palma, colorful in the morning sunlight. At the outskirts of the town, following Corcovado's directions, he turned off sharply to the right upon a narrow road that wound its way inland through fields of sugar-cane.

"This," explained Corcovado, "is the *Camino Real*, built by Don José's ancestors."

Gradually the plaster houses of straggling suburbs gave way to fragile wooden bungalows—then habitations ceased as the emerged into open country. They passed a sugar *central*, its trio of chimneys looming like a battleship in a pallid green sea of waving cane, belching acrid smoke into the serene sky; and, presently, shot by a dilapidated framework building through whose open doors they glimpsed a score of listless children droning out their lessons to a somnolent teacher. The sight of the school appeared to irritate Don José; he muttered something about inefficiency and corruption, which Everett caught faintly as they sped along the white road.

At regular intervals they passed a *carretera*, a roadkeeper's lodge built of dull orange brick work, fast tumbling to decay. In times gone by, Corcovado stated garrulously, these men had kept the

road in perfect condition. As it was, the car swayed and jolted over an atrociously rough surface.

"Don José, in power, would change all this," he whispered, his eye alight with enthusiasm.

The road commenced, after some twenty miles, a slow ascent amidst a range of cup-shaped hills. The vegetation changed, almost imperceptibly. Sugar-cane gave way to sloping fields of tobacco laid out in geometrical precision, scattered here and there with thatched drying sheds; but the tobacco, seen from the road, was shrivelled and starved-looking, the thatched *robeles* neglected and falling to ruin.

An old man clad in a pink shirt and white trousers, mounted on a mule, his attenuated legs dragging in the dust, shouted something derisive as the car hummed past him. Corcovado frowned; glanced back nervously at Don José.

"A government employee," he whispered to Everett. "One of Pinar's men. They all dislike Don José because they fear that he is opening the eyes of the people——"

"Hold your tongue, Corcovado!" Don José shouted from behind; and Everett, bending over the steering wheel to conceal a smile, marvelled at Corcovado's constant indiscretions.

At the summit of the range, a thousand meters above the level of the sea, he stopped the car, to allow the bubbling radiator to cool. Don José climbed down from the tonneau and lighted a

cigarillo; the deep-set eyes in his mahogany face were bright with anger. He motioned abruptly to Corcovado to take the back seat while he himself jumped in beside Everett. He pulled out a watch, thin as a gold coin, and glanced at it anxiously; then waved a long arm toward the distant horizon, where Everett could detect a faint strip of silver gleaming beyond the greenness of the tobacco fields.

"I must be in Los Barrios by noon," he said, and his words were in the nature of a command.

They dived down the valley in shuddering, swaying flight. Everett noted, with some approbation, that Don José showed no signs of nervousness as the speedometer needle crept up to the figure fifty-five—and wavered there. The big man was clinging to his hat, his white teeth biting into the stub of his *cigarillo*.

"You drive well," he shouted, and the sound of his voice came as a mere whisper through whirling clouds of gray dust.

A minute before noon they sped down a long straight avenue of flamboya trees in vivid bloom, their petals strewing the roadway with an orange carpet, and entered the streets of Los Barrios. It was a straggling, white-washed town, breathing a general atmosphere of exhausted vitality, its streets reeking with damp, cloying odor of sugar in bulk. At Don José's direction Everett turned the car into a plaza in the centre of the town, a treeless

expanse of steaming asphalt, and stopped before an unpretentious house of white plaster.

A stout, oily little man emerged from the house at the sound of the car, pausing to glance nervously up and down the deserted plaza. Apparently reassured, he came forward to grasp Don José's hand.

"*Se bienvenido*," he murmured; after which he looked suspiciously at Everett.

Don José waved a reassuring hand.

"A new member of my staff," he explained in Spanish.

The fat man whispered something which Everett could not hear. And then the three of them went into the white house, leaving him alone in the car.

Don José and Corcovado did not reappear until an hour later; both of them, it seemed to Everett, were in a state of elation. Don José signified his wish to return immediately to Santa Palma.

As the car left the plaza and turned up a dusty, cobblestoned street a group of men seated under the striped awning of a bodega raised a faint but unmistakable cheer.

"*Viva Don José!*"

Everett, glancing back, saw that all of them were young men—well-dressed, alert-looking citizens of the better class.

"*Valientes!*" cried Don José, evidently well pleased. He stood up in the car. "Brave fellows. It is such men that I need——"

At that instant a stone, propelled by some unseen

hand and coming from a direction opposite the bodega, crashed through the windshield, leaving a bullet-like hole in the shattered glass. Don José sat down, and shook with laughter. Observing Everett's expression of astonishment, he said grandiloquently:

"Like all prominent men, you see, I have both the friends and the enemies. It is yet to be proved which are in the majority."

Life, then, in Esperanza was not to be devoid of excitement after all, thought Everett. The hurtling of the stone through the windshield tingled his senses, added a sudden new zest to existence. He drove recklessly, but magnificently, back to Santa Palma, covering the eighty odd miles in a little over two hours.

Corcovado alighted, shaken and pale. Don José, cool and smiling, grasped Everett's hand before he turned to enter the Casa Azul.

"You are a man after my own heart," he vowed.

It was the beginning of their mutual understanding.

II

In the blue shadows of the tropic evening a man came to the Casa Azul. Everett, from an upstairs balcony, saw him plodding slowly up the road from Santa Palma, a lonely, diminutive figure in the gathering twilight. As he approached the house Everett gazed at him with increasing interest, for

he saw that the stranger was no native of Esperanza. A tall, loose-limbed young man he proved to be, clad in a suit of grayish material, and carrying a small pigskin suitcase; the gray felt hat, worn well at the back of his head, revealed an abundance of crisp hair, the color of straw. The man's lean face, with its high, prominent cheek bones, was mirthless, sombre in expression; his mouth a firm, straight line; his chin sharply aggressive.

He passed through the roadside gateway with a confident, swinging stride, and a moment later Everett heard the wire screen doors of the house clatter behind him. It occurred to him, instantly, that the young man must be well at home at the Casa Azul, since he did not detect the usual ringing of the doorbell, a ponderous affair whose jangling echo he had become accustomed to during his stay at the house.

A servant boy appeared at Everett's elbow presently, and stated that he was wanted below. He followed the boy downstairs to the front hall where he discovered Don José and the newcomer.

"Gail," Don José said, "I wish to present you to Mr. Erik Tegel, a friend and business partner of mine."

Everett shook hands with the stranger. Face to face with him, he discovered that he was even taller than he had thought—a full six feet, probably. An extraordinarily grim, uncompromising young man, he decided.

"I am delighted," Tegel remarked, in a bass voice tinged with a foreign accent, "to make your acquaintance." He turned immediately to Don José with an unspoken question upon his features. Don José shook his head, almost imperceptibly. It was all very mysterious, Everett thought.

After a few minutes' polite conversation the two of them entered Don José's library, leaving Everett to himself.

Having nothing to do at the moment he strolled casually out to the strip of garden that lay between the house and the roadway, and there sat down upon a rattan chair to smoke a cigarette. It so happened that he had seated himself not far from the arabesqued window spaces of Don José's library, and presently he heard voices from within. They were speaking in Spanish.

"The boy does not know—?" he heard Tegel asking.

And then Don José's voice, quick and nervous:

"Of course not . . . later on, maybe, if necessary . . . he can be trusted, I think."

The voices drifted into an incoherent murmuring. Lost in thought, he left the garden and started back to his room. They could trust him . . . later on they would tell him. . . . What was brooding in this strange house, anyway? What was it that Don José was planning, planning, so meticulously? . . . His mind reverted to certain formless phrases of Corcovado, certain hints concerning Don

José's ambitions for the future. And then, all of a sudden, the truth dawned upon him; the whole thing became ridiculously obvious—a revolution, of course! Don José must be aiming at some great coup, a sudden and unexpected seizure of Esperanza's governmental reins, in the manner so dear to the Spanish-American temperament. That would explain, too, the incidents of the trip to Los Barrios; the friendliness of certain young men; the palpable enmity of others—Pinar's decrepit agent, for instance, who had shouted something abusive as he passed them on his mule. But who, then, was Erik Tegel, the European stranger who was so evidently in Don José's good graces? His pondering over this latest development as he climbed the broad stairs to his bedroom, was abruptly cut short by a new surprise—the sound of a woman's voice emanating from the floor above, singing a soft Castilian ballad; the voice was at once plaintive and arresting in the sheer colorfulness of its tones. He stood stock still, gripped the banisters.

He encountered Corcovado descending, a sheaf of typewritten letters in his hand.

"Who is that singing?" he asked.

Corcovado smiled.

"Ah! The lady's voice arouses my young friend's curiosity—eh?"

Everett almost disliked him at that moment.

"It is the voice of Bianca Valdez—Don José's niece. She lives in the white villa beyond the

garden, and 'as come tonight to dine with Don José—that is all I can tell you.”

“One never sees her,” Everett mused, unconsciously voicing his thoughts.

Corcovado appeared somewhat annoyed.

“Naturally not. She is, most of the time, in her villa. You would not expect to see a lady wandering about at all hours of the day?”

He terminated the conversation abruptly by continuing his way down the stairs.

Everett went up to the first floor, and turned into the cool, narrow passage leading to his room. Quite suddenly he came upon Bianca Valdez. In mutual surprise at the encounter they stood, motionless, waiting for each other to pass; Everett, awkward, hat in hand; she, wide-eyed, confused, a hand fluttering nervously at the white bosom of her dress. And in the sombre blue half-light of the passage, in that endless instant of surprise and revelation, Everett realized that she was undeniably beautiful. . . . He had, it is true, the merest glimpse of a delicate ivory face, a tall, supple figure, blue-black hair worn tightly about a proudly-held head; but the memory of poignant hazel eyes, gazing startled at him, lingered in his mind long after she had vanished in the obscurity that lay at the far end of the corridor.

CHAPTER VII

I

A WEEK drifted by, pleasantly. Everett was kept moderately busy, sometimes driving Don José about Santa Palma while he called at various houses, sometimes taking him for a moonlight ride along the white roads during the cool hours after dinner. The novelty of this new life appealed to him, yet he feared that before long the novelty would wear off, and he would be adrift once more—searching for something new, as was his way.

Nothing occurred to break the monotony of well-ordered routine until one mid-December morning, when flamboyant posters, pasted on the walls of Santa Palma's public buildings, announced a gala performance at the Teatro Municipal that evening; *Carmen* was to be sung by a full company from the Opera of Mexico City, and President Pinar had declared his attention of attending the performance. Such events happened rarely enough in Santa Palma, and by noontime the town was a fluttering mass of green and red banners—the national colors of Esperanza. Corcovado brought the news up to

the Casa Azul at the luncheon hour, and Everett—who happened to be receiving certain perfunctory instructions regarding the car from Don José when he arrived—saw the elder man's face grow grave.

"Are you certain?" he questioned Corcovado, "that Pinar himself will attend the performance?"

"I am certain," Corcovado assured him. "The news is all over the town. The presidential box is being decorated. All the Ministers will be present, too, I am told."

Don José received the information with a gravity that perplexed Everett; he saw nothing unusual in the fact of a president attending an operatic performance in the capital of the republic which he served; and said so. Don José replied very quietly:

"Patience, my lad, patience. These things must all become clear to you, soon enough. All I will say is that this *viejo* Pinar is more brave than I was thinking he was."

Later on Corcovado informed Everett that this would be Pinar's first public appearance in many months.

"But why?" Everett asked, wholly puzzled. "What danger is there?"

Corcovado laughed; placed a hand upon his shoulder.

"As Don José 'as told you, 'ave patience and you will presently understand. Pinar 'as enemies, and those enemies are the friends of Don José. This public appearance at the Opera tonight was un-

expected—what the French call *l'audace*. You see what I mean?"

"A kind of challenge," suggested Everett, the situation becoming slightly clearer to him.

"Exactly. And tonight Don José will also attend the Opera, in a box opposite that of President Pinar. Don José is not the man to miss a glorious opportunity; to remain at home would be to admit that he is of a weakness—that he is a coward. I am telling you all these things which he himself would not tell you, because I believe that no man can serve his master well if he is kept in the dark."

"Thank you," said Everett, unimpressed.

And then as Don José appeared, Corcovado became hurriedly absorbed in details of the moment.

"—You will 'ave the auto ready for us at 'alf past seven—eh? And during the *entreacto*, which will be about ten o'clock, you will report to Don José's box, in case he should desire to leave before the performance is over."

Another listless, idle afternoon. The typewriter beyond the closed doors tapping out its usual monotonous song. Downstairs, the sound of murmuring voices; Don José engaged in earnest, subdued conversation—hour after hour.

After dinner Don José appeared at the door of the house resplendent in white evening clothes, a scarlet ribbon worn diagonally across the vast bosom of his starched shirt; Corcovado a pace behind him, suave and over-mannered. Tegel, too, accompanied

them as they climbed into the car; he was in faultless English evening clothes, silent as ever; his mouth set perhaps a trifle more grimly than usual. Everett, as he threw in the clutch and headed toward the distant, trembling pinpoints of light where Santa Palma lay, thought that his passengers were indeed an oddly-assorted trio.

It became evident, presently, that Corcovado had been drinking. He sat beside Everett hatless, his sleek black hair waving in the night breeze; his cheeks hectic, eyes unduly bright.

"Tonight," he muttered, "things may happen. . . ."

But Everett, intent upon the winding road, paid little attention to his rambling remarks.

II

The fact of his having to wait at the wheel of the car under the tamarinds of the Plaza Nacional throughout three hours of an operatic performance brought home to Everett, more than anything else had done, his true position in the household of Don José; the idea struck his sense of humor, but his amusement was tinged with a shade of irony. After all, he thought, he had found no adventure at all; there was nothing inspiring in the business of being chauffeur to a citizen of an apparently well-ordered West Indian republic; it was, certainly, nothing to boast about . . . he was guilty of no snobbishness, but he came to the conclusion that if

something did not occur within the next few weeks to ameliorate his position he would leave the Casa Azul, wander to the interior of the island and find occupation, perhaps, on a plantation.

Some few minutes after ten o'clock—as Corcovado had predicted—the entracte took place, and crowds came streaming out of the brilliantly lighted foyer of the Teatro Municipal. Young men gathered in groups under the trees, lighting cigarettes, animatedly discussing the performance; girls in white muslin dresses promenaded the square in trios, arm in arm, and as they passed, the young *caballeros* eyed them with flirtatious glances. From within the theatre came the sound of the orchestra tuning up, and an overwhelming babel of voices. Remembering his instructions, Everett left the car, which was by now the center of an admiring group of idlers, in charge of a *gendarme* and hurried into the theatre. A uniformed usher led him, zigzagging, through the crowds in the imitation marble lobby, and down a sloping, sombre passage to the door of a proscenium box.

Don José was seated in the front of the box; in one hand he held an elaborate pair of opera glasses, with the other he twirled his moustache ceaselessly with an air of nervous impatience. Everett saw at a glance that all eyes in the theatre were upon Don José, and in the sea of white upturned faces he fancied he detected an intangible spirit of deference, of sheer, silent admiration. . . . The big man

seemed, outwardly at least, unaware of the attention he was causing. In the proscenium box directly opposite, which—unlike Don José's box—was decorated with the flags of Esperanza, sat an old man with a pointed white beard and a rotund, barrel-like figure; his bald head was nodding sleepily; his eyes, puckered with rings of superfluous flesh, were half closed. Across his ample shirt front was a string of tinsel-like medals. Everett glanced at Don José, then back at President Pinar, and the contrast struck him forcibly. Here was one man still in his prime, vital, alive, eyes aglow with limitless ambition; there was a pathetic old creature, already touched with the heavy hand of senility, his face characterless, his expression devoid of the slightest semblance of interest in what was going on about him—a puppet, a glorified figurehead. Even as he watched he saw a young officer seated behind Pinar prod him in the back, whisper a sharp command in his ear, whereupon the President of Esperanza sat up straight in his chair with a look of pained astonishment in his faded, mild blue eyes. That little incident was of itself more illuminative of the Esperanzan political situation than all of Corcovado's high-flown phrases.

Don José waved Everett away with a gesture of his jewelled hand.

"I will not need you until the performance is over," he said; and Everett, whose indignation had risen hotly at the imperiousness of his tone, stifled

his feelings in the knowledge that the gesture was but for the benefit of watching eyes in the audience. He made his way quietly toward the entrance of the theatre.

In the foyer Corcovado buttonholed him; the man was drunk, he saw immediately; his lean, dark face was flushed to an unhealthy crimson, his hair rumpled, his breath redolent with the sickening pungency of *aguardiente*.

"You see, *amigo mio*," he cried in Spanish, "how they welcome Don José! His power grows; he becomes famous from tonight. His success is assured——"

His voice was shrill; he waved thin arms. Everett, aware of a curious group of listeners, tried to calm him.

"Shh!" he whispered, taking Corcovado's arm. "It isn't wise—to discuss these things in public."

But Corcovado, with all the sensitiveness of the intoxicated, was affronted at the gentle rebuff.

"Why should I be quiet?" he bellowed, while Everett eyed the growing crowd about them with some concern. "Right now, here in the Teatro Municipal of Santa Palma, I say that Pinar's day is finished—he is of the past; a dead letter."

And then there happened precisely what Everett feared. An officer, black-browed and truculent, gaudy of uniform, with an immense sword dangling at his belt, elbowed his way through the

gathering throng, and stood face to face with Corcovado.

"Have a care what you say, fellow!" he cried.

Corcovado, throwing all caution aside now, tossed his head defiantly. He drew himself to his full height, cried out Pinar's name with immeasurable contempt, and followed it by a short, virulent Spanish word which Everett did not comprehend.

The officer turned white; the crowd wavered back, aghast. The officer seized Corcovado abruptly by the collar, summoned a *gendarme* standing at the door. Corcovado wheeled upon him suddenly, struck him with the flat of his hand, leaving a scarlet weal upon the soldier's dark cheek. Everett, incredulous, amazed, stepped back involuntarily with the crowd. He heard the rasp of a sword blade against its sheath; saw a swift arc of silver flash through the smoke-laden air. There was a thud upon the floor; an intense, pregnant silence.

He peered forward over the shoulders of a man. A woman screamed. Something lay crumpled, inert, upon the black and white tiled floor, in a growing pool of crimson; and the battered, dreadful thing which had been Corcovado's face made him feel suddenly and violently sick. . . . A blinding, insensate rage swept over him at the officer who stood there, so calmly, replacing his scarlet sword within its scabbard. The foyer became a shrieking pandemonium. He started toward the officer in an access of uncontrolled fury. . . . Strong hands seized him

from behind; restrained him. He heard Tegel's voice, curt and incisive, above the clamor of the mob.

"Keep out of it. It will do no good. The military would kill you, too—like a dog."

"But—but—" He slowly fought down his anger to a more reasoning calm. He was, at the moment, supremely conscious of a longing for the untterrified democracy of his homeland, where such swift, terrible things did not, could not happen. "—They murdered him, Tegel! Something must be done. Something——"

Tegel shook his head.

"Not now—but our time will come. Hurry now to the car. Don José has just slipped out of a side door. We must find him."

He led Everett firmly out into the moonlight. The Plaza was packed with a swaying, shrieking mass of humanity; *gendarmes* were running up and down, swords rattling, trying to stem the rising tide of fury. No one, apparently, noticed Tegel and Everett as they hurried under the trees to the car; climbed in.

Don José was not there.

"He is probably waiting for us in the street back of the theatre," Tegel suggested. "He is too wise to play into the hands of these blunderers."

Everett started the car, not yet trusting himself to speak. His gaze was riveted upon a pair of soldiers who, in the white glare of the arc lights before

the theatre, were carrying a limp, bloodstained burden toward a waiting wagon.

"*Viva Pinar!*" someone shouted from the blackness beneath the tamarind trees.

And instantly, a dozen or more defiant voices thundered back:

"*Viva Don José . . . Viva los Valientes!*"

Stones came hurtling through the night air; crashed with a resounding impact against the plaster walls of the theatre. Angry altercations rose, here and there, in the compact, surging mass of humanity. Everett, proceeding at a cautious pace, turned the car down a side street and into merciful, silent darkness.

They discovered Don José, presently, waiting near the back of the theatre for them. His self-possession, as he lighted an immense cigar before taking his seat in the tonneau, was intact.

CHAPTER VIII

I

WHEN they reached the Casa Azul Don José, to Everett's surprise, beckoned to both Tegel and himself to follow him into the library. It was the first time that Everett had been in the room; he found it a comfortable chamber, softly lighted, furnished with shallow armchairs of Russian leather, tables laden with books and magazines of an international character; the sombre, cool gray walls were lined with low bookcases, and—here and there—an etching, or a mezzotint, of irreproachable taste. Don José closed the door softly, motioned to them to be seated, and drew up an armchair for himself. The mellow rays of a reading lamp upon a circular mahogany table fell obliquely upon his features, casting his incisive profile in sharp relief against the black shadow of an angle in the wall behind him. He was outwardly calm. This very armor of impassivity which he could seemingly command at will was, Everett thought, one of his most striking traits.

He addressed them both in English in soft, modu-

lated tones—his voice barely above a whisper—and while he talked his fingers beat a gentle tattoo upon the surface of the table, which alone betrayed the nervous tension within him.

"When I heard what had happened," he began, "I left the theatre by the back way—not because I feared to face anyone, but because I did not wish to endanger our cause in case those *militares* should begin to ask questions of me."

He paused; dipped his slender fingers into a jade box containing cigarettes that lay upon the table, and lighted one with careful deliberation.

"The death of Corcovado has, however, made a change in our plans. It must, of a certainty, lead to quicker action on our part. Indeed, it seems to me that it gives us the required excuse for such action."

"How?" Tegel asked sharply.

Don José smiled.

"Why—we demand an apology from Pinar, of course."

"It was a terrible thing," Everett remarked suddenly, feeling that it was time for someone to express sympathy.

Don José looked at him curiously, almost as if he were for the first time aware of his presence. He nodded in a perfunctory way.

"Yes—that was too bad. But Corcovado, you see, was bound to come to such an end. He talked too much. Many times did I warn him of that. He was a fool, and yet—and yet he served his purpose. He

was useful, in a way, that talkative young man . . .”

Listening to those words Everett obtained, illuminatingly, a fresh insight into Don José character. His indignation at the cool acceptance of Corcovado's brutal murder was tempered with a faint but wholly irrepressible admiration. It was of such fibre, such implacability, he felt, that great men were made. . . .

“Now that Corcovado is gone,” Don José continued, “I have no secretary; he was valuable in that respect——”

He broke off, regarding Everett thoughtfully.

“Can you typewrite?”

Everett nodded uneasily.

“Good. Then I think you shall take the place of Corcovado. It will be better for you also. To drive the automobile is not a worthy occupation for a young man of your intelligence. I will put the negro, Hoya, back in his old place as chauffeur.”

Tegel interrupted, frowning.

“Is—is this young man in your complete confidence?” he enquired.

The question seemed, momentarily, to perplex Don José.

“Ah! That is so—an important point I had forgotten. How much of our affairs do you know, Gail? Answer me this thing frankly.”

Everett outlined briefly the hints Corcovado had now and then dropped to him, together with his own surmise of the situation, gathered from his observa-

tion of the natives' behavior in the presence of Don José.

"So you see," he concluded, "I have only the vaguest idea of your plan. I'm pretty sure that a revolution is in the air, but I'm ignorant of details. I don't even know—" he laughed a trifle nervously,—"who Mr. Tegel is, where he comes from, and what he is here for."

Don José glided over this hint for some information concerning Tegel hurriedly—unsatisfactorily, Everett thought.

"Mr. Tegel is my chief assistant, my right-hand man, as you Americans say. And now, my young *amigo*, if you wish to throw in your fortune with ours we will be most glad to have you with us—but you must, first of all, give the promise of secrecy. I will say this of you Anglo-Saxons: that most of you keep the word once it has been given. Come now, what do you say?"

After a moment's deliberation Everett said:

"I'll go through this affair with you, but on one condition. When it's over, whether you've succeeded or failed, I'm to be released without further obligations."

"You have the business head, my young man. *Bueno*—I think we can promise that."

"I'll have it written," Everett added calmly, "if you please."

"*Caramba!*" Don José's brow was clouded with sudden irritation. He looked at Everett, neverthe-

less, with a new show of interest. "It is strange that I, Don José Rodriguez, must have my terms dictated to me by a mere lad——"

"Business is business," Everett said, thoroughly enjoying the situation; and airily lighted a cigarette.

Tegel jumped up.

"I suggest you cease to trouble yourself about this young gentleman, sir," he said hotly. "You can always get a good secretary at Santa Palma to fill Corcovado's place."

"N-no," Don José replied, shaking his great head. "That would be impossible, Tegel. If I should try to obtain a secretary from Santa Palma these days how could I be assured that he was not a Federalist spy?"

He rose from his chair with an air of resignation and strolled toward a desk in a far corner of the room; then beckoned to Everett.

"Come, Meester Gail," he said, with a wholly ironical politeness, "this contract which you consider of such an importance. How shall the terms of it be?"

Thus mockingly did he cover his acquiescence to Everett's request.

II

At midnight Tegel retired. Don José and Everett were left alone. Everett sat very still in his arm-chair waiting, while the older man moved deliberately about the room gathering a book and a paper

here and there, several maps which he folded carefully. Presently he resumed his seat near Everett, laid the collected paraphernalia upon the table.

"I trust you," he began simply. "I know your type. Travel and long experience has made me familiar with different kinds of men. For this reason I feel that I can, without danger, put before you the outlines of my plan. But, first of all, I shall explain to you my motives, for I am of the opinion that no man can put to use his full ability unless he is personally convinced that his cause is a righteous one. Is that not the truth?"

Youthfully, Everett could not resist putting in a hint of a counter argument as it occurred to him.

"The German cause was not right," he suggested, "yet they certainly extended themselves to their full capacity——"

Don José waved an impatient hand.

"*Precisamente*. But I did not say that the cause was, of a necessity, one of justice. I said that the man who worked for that cause had to be, himself, convinced of its justice—no matter whether he was right or wrong. And now to this business——"

He sketched briefly, with an admirable conciseness and choice of words, the history of Esperanza. He told of its greatness in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century under the sway of the Rodriguez clan; he outlined the failure of Juan the Second to come up to the country's expectations; his weaknesses; the revolution and the ensuing decay of Es-

peranza. He grew mordant, bitterly sarcastic, as he portrayed the national industries of coffee, sugar and tobacco falling from their pristine importance to a mere shadow of what they had once been. He went on to tell of the corruption of the present government, a combination of politicians and the military caste, which had been in power for seven long years. Pinar, it appeared, was but a figure-head; the others were piling tax upon tax upon the people, filling their own pockets, not spending a penny towards the improvement of the nation. Only recently they had passed in the *Senado* a bill, limiting national elections to every ten years, thereby assuring themselves of comfortable nests for some time to come. When elections did take place, Don José asserted, there seemed to be no integrity whatever amongst those conducting the ballot system. . . . As a result of these things the population was rapidly becoming ambitionless, fatalistic—without hope.

“But the spirit is there still,” he concluded, waxing enthusiastic. “Pinar’s clique make their worst mistake when they conclude that they are ruling a spineless, degenerate people. I, myself, have had the proof, again and again, that they are wrong. And the greatest proof is that twenty-five thousand men—young men, too, strong and alert—have pledged themselves to my cause. They have called themselves the *Valientes*—brave, splendid fellows who will, in one glorious sweep of arms, bring to Esperanza a new régime of honesty and progress.”

"*Valientes*," murmured Everett. "I've heard the word before."

"Yes, that is the battle cry of my party. For many, many months I have worked, and my brave agents have worked, sowing the seeds of this great movement. When the day comes—and pray God it will soon—" he crossed himself devoutly "—these *Valientes* of the Liberationist party will rise, under my leadership. Others, who shall observe their success and shall wish to be on the winning side (the world is full of such creatures lacking initiative of their own) will join them. In less than twenty-four hours the wretched Federalists will be crushed, and Esperanza will be free."

"How about arms?" Everett asked.

Don José flashed him a glance of approval.

"Ten thousand rifles, and ammunition for them, one hundred and twenty machine guns, are already hidden upon this island. Another such quantity is expected by a second shipment at any time. It is for that, personally, that I am waiting."

Innocently Everett enquired:

"Who is supplying all this stuff?"

It seemed to him that Don José was peculiarly perturbed by the question. He hesitated; his answer was evasive.

"The money was gathered by secret subscription—and then, of course, my entire personal fortune is also involved."

He took up a brightly colored map from the table.

"And now a little geography to follow our history lesson, so that my young friend shall be master of the situation."

He tapped the map with a pencil.

"This is Esperanza, one hundred miles long, eighty miles across at its widest point. Here, in the centre of the northern coast, is Santa Palma, the capital and the seat of government. There, in the centre of the southern coast, is Los Barrios, a sea-port and headquarters garrison—the home of the military caste. You see, therefore, that no political party can exist if it is not in full control of both these towns; the one is useless without the other. Between Santa Palma and Los Barrios is the *Camino Real*, the great road over which we travelled some days ago.

"As to the other towns, there are none of importance except Rivadavia on the eastern coast, the centre of the coffee industry. The Rivadavians may cause us trouble; my agents have, frankly, made little progress amongst them. They support the present government because there are many Rivadavians in the Cabinet, who look after the coffee interests since it pays them to do it. There is a railway between Santa Palma and this Rivadavia which was built by the French in 1890—it has never paid. When my party is in power it will be made government property. Still, I am not worrying about Rivadavia; when the whole

country has swung to our side that miserable town will be easily conquered."

Everett asked whether the Federalists had a large army to support them.

"Barely ten thousand, but they are fairly well trained and their officers are good. However, as there is compulsory military service of one year for all men in this country, my own followers have all had some training. And at present they are being drilled, instructed secretly, under a new European system. Tegel attends to that——"

He paused abruptly as someone tapped upon the door of the library.

III

Everett turned quickly in his chair as Bianca Valdez came into the room. An involuntary ripple of annoyance crossed Don José's brow, but he banished it swiftly as he rose to greet his niece. For a moment the two of them conversed rapidly in low voices while Everett, listening, heard the name of Corcovado uttered several times, and saw her eyes widen with horror as Don José told her the news.

"Allow me," said Don José, turning suddenly towards him, "to introduce my friend and secretary, Mr. Everett Gail. This is my niece, Señora Valdez."

Then she was married. He was, for the instant, absurdly taken aback. He shook hands with her;

she spoke to him in faultless English, tinged with the faintest possible blurr of an accent.

"I am glad," she said, "that you are with us. Poor Corcovado. . . . Without a secretary my uncle would be helpless; he has always such heaps of work to be done."

She sat down, with instinctive grace, in an arm-chair, eyeing him with a cool, impersonal scrutiny. Then she saw the outspread maps, the scattered books upon the table.

"I'm afraid I'm interrupting—" she remarked; her voice whimsical, almost contemptuous. It was clear to Everett that she, in her aloof detachment, had but little interest in her uncle's magnificent plans.

Don José denied the suggestion, good naturedly.

"No. We have talked enough about our plans for tonight. Mr. Gail, I am satisfied, will be an asset to my venture. And now, let us talk of pleasanter things. What have you been doing, my dear? It is almost a week since I last had the pleasure of seeing you."

She answered slowly, lazily, her eyes resting on Everett in a kind of mute speculation. She had been in her villa, she said, most of the time; it was too hot to go out very much. Once or twice she had been down to Santa Palma to do some shopping; she had also ridden out to visit her little sugar plantation near the village of Cristobal. She spoke with a quiet reserve, an intangible aloofness—as if she were, in some way, remote from the world and

its doings; there was about her an air of gentle resignation. Everett guessed, suddenly, that she had suffered; had been through, perhaps, some great, even heartbreaking trouble. . . .

As she sat there before him, her softly-moulded chin resting in one cupped hand, listening to Don José's polite, perfunctory conversation, Everett studied her furtively. He liked especially her narrowed, slightly oblique hazel eyes, lazily half-closed; the blue-black hair that rippled back from her temples and was worn closely about her well-shaped head—hair that gleamed in the rays of the lamplight, just as the patent leather tips of her quite perfect little white shoes gleamed, too. There was an immaculate, indescribable freshness to her; a faultless perfection of attire.

He speculated in haphazard fashion upon her age. She was young, and yet old at the same time—certainly young in the sheer unlined beauty of her features, the lithe, superb grace of her supple figure; but old in the unfathomable depths of her poignant hazel eyes. She must be between twenty-five and thirty, he concluded eventually. He felt, curiously enough, that age was with her a static thing; that she had always been as old as she was, but that she would remain forever young. . . .

Once she detected his eyes fastened upon her in unconsciously patent admiration and a faint flush crept to the soft curve of her cheek, only to heighten her vivid youth.

Before she rose to leave she whispered something to Don José in quick, sibilant Spanish. He nodded. She turned to Everett, extending a cool, friendly hand.

"Some day," she said, "when time is idle on your hands—my uncle cannot keep you forever at work—you must come over and see my villa, which is just beyond the wall at the back of the garden. I have a few things there that may interest you—many English books, for instance."

She nodded lightly and was gone. In the room there still lingered the faintest perceptible scent of jasmine.

Don José turned out the lamps gravely, one by one.

"A lovely woman," he remarked dispassionately, "—but one whom the world treated harshly indeed."

That was all the information he was apparently inclined to vouch, and Everett was for the moment too wise to further question him.

CHAPTER IX

I

ANOTHER fortnight passed, serenely and without undue incident. Everett soon discovered that in his new capacity he had little or no time left to indulge in the luxury of his own thoughts. Indeed, the business of being a secretary assumed greater proportions than he could possibly have anticipated; there was an immense variety to his work—and that, he considered, was wholly in his favor. Sometimes Don José would spend the whole day in the library, dictating slowly and carefully to him in Spanish while he sat at the typewriter; his knowledge of the language, he found, was increasing rapidly these days. The dictation covered a variety of subjects—men and munitions; advancement of money; the training of recruits. These letters, or rather bulletins, were despatched to agents in different parts of Esperanza by means of messengers who appeared occasionally, at almost any hour of the day or night, guised as the most innocent of peasants. And then, again, there were maps to be reproduced, for which purpose Don José

supplied him with a curious, old-fashioned gelatin copying machine which he nicknamed The Jelly-fish . . . maps which were divided into mysterious squares called *cadres*, these squares containing innumerable figures and cabalistic signs, the meanings of which were never precisely clear in Everett's mind. Apart from all these things, matters of daily routine, Don José indulged in a correspondence of his own—long letters penned in his own flowing hand which Everett was never permitted to read, and which, when completed, were placed in a locked portfolio of limp leather, ultimately to be handed to Tegel. Where these letters went Everett could not guess; he was aware that Don José received once in a while, through Tegel, voluminous letters bearing foreign stamps, but these were so hurriedly concealed from him that he was unable to determine their origin. He found himself wondering as to why Don José did not take him completely into his confidence; yet he held his peace, feeling that he would eventually learn what he wanted to know by maintaining an incurious silence. It was not in the big man's character, he knew, to pander to an idle inquisitiveness.

On one occasion, when Don José had gone for the day to Los Barrios by himself, he accidentally discovered in one of the library bookcases a file of catalogues and estimates relating to a new type of water-cooled machine gun. The wording was in atrocious Spanish, and—singularly enough—the

name of the manufacturing firm had been carefully obliterated from every document by an application of opaque copying ink. This, too, set him to wondering.

Late one afternoon when his services were not required by Don José, he suddenly recalled Bianca Valdez's invitation and, shortly after five o'clock, strolled through the garden, passed through a gate in the scarlet wall of bourgainvillea, and entered the grounds of her villa. It was a trim, square, unadorned little house possessing an indefinable air of neatness. His summons at the door was answered by a curtsyng ebony servant girl, who ushered him into the house with a certain amount of deference mingled with a pop-eyed curiosity which she did not attempt to conceal.

He found himself in a low-ceilinged, narrow living room, the windowless archways of which, overlooking the garden, were sheltered from the slanting afternoon sun by straw-colored curtains that billowed gently in the soft breeze. The walls of the room were of a creamy tone, adorned here and there with wide-margined marine pastels; the furniture was of lustreless white rattan, light and comfortable, cushioned in chintz. On a circular table, in a shadowy corner, there was a *famille de rose* bowl filled to overflowing with delicate pink pomegranate blossoms; a paper-covered French novel or two, and some sewing materials in a happy, careless little heap—a very feminine room indeed;

homelike, yet rather gravely formal in its utter simplicity.

She came in, presently, from the brick terrace of the garden, her arms laden with flowers, and proceeded to greet him with such a wholly natural, unaffected pleasure that he was almost immediately at his ease.

They talked. She wanted to know many little things about New York and the United States; to which country she had never been—but studiously seemed to avoid asking him any questions about himself. As she chatted easily and lightly upon a variety of subjects it became increasingly evident to him that here was a woman of unusual education, refinement of taste; of rare and delicate perception.

“Where,” he asked, amazed, “did you learn to speak English so perfectly?”

She sighed faintly; nervously plucked a stray thread from the embroidery of her white dress.

“In Paris and London,” she told him. “I lived in Europe, was educated there for six years. After that I returned here, to Santa Palma—and was married.”

She ended the sentence with an odd little jerk, uttering the last word with a faint but palpable irony which was accentuated by a sudden downward twist of her sensitive lips; and, somehow, she conveyed very clearly to Everett that she preferred not to speak, or even think, of the past. He found

himself pondering, for the second time since he had made her acquaintance, as to what had happened to her; why in all the fullness of her youth and beauty she constantly gave him that intangible impression of resignation. . . . He collected his wandering thoughts together with a start at the sound of her voice, continuing:

"Do you really think you are going to benefit," she was asking him with a peculiar deliberation, "by going through this—this wild venture with Don José? How can you be interested in the doings of this futile little country? Why don't you go home now, while you are free to go. In a week, perhaps, there will be no possibility of leaving Santa Palma, until this horrible revolution is settled."

His young vanity was promptly and absurdly wounded; but this was in turn succeeded by a sense of curiosity as to her motives for the suggestion.

"I might as well stay on," he replied negligently. "I'd like to go through a thing like that—a revolution; be right in the thick of it—next to the very maker of it, in fact. Life's pretty prosaic these days, you know, up home. Work all day, of the dullest kind, and a little standardized amusement at night. Routine, that's all it amounts to. I'm afraid I wasn't cut out for that kind of thing; that's why I left—in search of adventure, excitement, something new——"

He broke off, a trifle ashamed at his outburst

of confidence. She laughed softly, yet in a way not to annoy him.

"One can see that you are still very young," she remarked, smiling. "I only wish that I had some of your—your eagerness left in me. I would like to feel that Life, after all, had something to offer to the seekers. . . . When I was your age I felt the same way as you, though——"

He flushed uncomfortably, and was more youthful than ever when he assured her that she could be but very little older than he.

"Perhaps not—in actual years," she admitted, coloring prettily. Then she tossed her head with a little gesture of impatience. "However, I must not depress you. That would not be very tactful, would it, upon your very first visit to my villa?"

The subtle conveyance that she expected him to come again—perhaps even frequently—pleased him and promptly restored to him his diminishing equanimity. To his surprise then, she rang a bell, and coffee was brought by the negro girl upon a silver tray, with delicate, flowered china and gleaming damask.

And so they chatted on, until the shadow beneath the white wall between the two gardens lengthened and grew dim, and a pale flaccid moon loomed in the almost colorless evening sky. In one of the archways overlooking the brick terrace a crested yellow and crimson cockatoo balanced itself first on one claw, then on the other, with the monotony

of a pendulum; performed restless acrobatic feats upon the bars of its gilded cage; shattered the warm stillness of the room now and again with a harsh, metallic screech.

As Everett rose to leave Bianca Valdez caught his eyes wandering towards the ebony grand piano, its top draped in old rose brocade, that stood unobtrusively in an alcove beyond the room.

"You like music?"

"Yes," said Everett. "I've heard your voice, too, in the distance. It was very beautiful."

"When you come again," she told him, "perhaps I'll sing for you. Let it be soon, won't you?"

She accompanied him to the door; and, had he glanced back as he hurried through the dusk beneath the overhanging palms, he would have seen her gazing after him, her eyes suddenly wistful.

II

Several more visits to Santa Palma in the merciless, blasting heat of the noon hours gradually dispelled from his mind his early and more enthusiastic impressions of the place. Whereas he had, at first, been absorbed in the tropic setting, the color and glamor of native life, the hundred and one glimpses of a universe that was new and strange to him, he had by now become accustomed to these things, become acclimatized, and his superficial enthusiasms were succeeded by a truer sense

of perspective. He became acutely aware of the intense, deadening squalor of the native quarters, the indifference and slovenliness of the people. For exactly four hours in the day—from seven in the morning until eleven—Santa Palma appeared to be a busy, thriving town; from eleven o'clock onward, as the sun increased in intensity, the inhabitants disappeared within their houses; the streets became desert spaces of broiling cobblestones and yielding, steaming asphalt. In the evening, towards six, there would be a sudden reversion to life; jalousies would be thrown open with a clatter throughout the town; men, women and children would come straggling out into the plazas for their evening promenade. They seemed to Everett an ambitionless people—polite and rather pleasant to deal with, but lacking in energy. Don José had assured him that they possessed a strong, coherent sense of patriotism, a fervent desire for betterment of their condition; of this he was inclined to be sceptical.—The revolution, at any rate, would supply the answer.

Don José went about everywhere in his car unmolested, Everett often with him, Hoya, the negro, at the wheel. Once in a while there would be a welcoming word shouted by some exceptionally ardent member of the populace as they passed by a bodega—as a result of which Don José, in a spirit of caution, issued one of his bulletins, to be secretly distributed, stating that “the head of the Libera-

tionist party was not, in future, to be accorded public manifestations of sympathy, much as he appreciated them—this in order to avoid attracting suspicion”—or, sometimes, they would encounter a dark scowl from some bemedalled, strutting army officer. Beyond these trivial but unmistakable signs no incident occurred. A great deal of Don José's time was spent in calling at various private residences, and upon these occasions he was careful to leave the car in some public plaza and proceed to the house on foot. It was his very caution, Everett realized, that prevented the government's laying hands upon him. He remained, outwardly, the perfect citizen; moreover, Pinar's men were fully aware that if he were arrested on some trumped-up charge, or one that was based merely on suspicion, his cause would be furthered greatly thereby, since the Esperanzans with their inflammable temperament and vaunted love of liberty would consider such an arrest an unwarranted presumption upon the rights of private citizens. Don José was, as every man knew, the friend of the people at this time; his gifts to the local charities, the hospitals of Santa Palma, alone sufficed to make him beloved by all except his political enemies.

This, then, was the situation in the latter part of December, when Everett was first given an opportunity to realize the perfection of Don José's plans.

III

It was midnight, after a day of continuous, tiring work in the library, and Everett was just about to tumble into bed when someone knocked gently at the door of his bedroom.

He discovered Erik Tegel standing in the dimly-lighted passage outside the door.

"Don José wants you," he said in a low voice. "This is an important night for us all. Get dressed and meet us downstairs as soon as possible."

Everett hurried into his clothes. Five minutes later he joined Tegel and Don José by the roadside gate. It was a moonless night, the sky impenetrable; a damp gray mist, eddying in from the sea, enveloped the garden. The palm fronds lay uncannily motionless about them, coated with a sheen of transparent moisture.

Don José pointed in the direction of the harbor, grasping Everett's arm.

"What do you see out there?" he whispered.

Everett strained his eyes to pierce the mantle of swirling grayness.

"I can see a yellow light—swaying slowly from side to side, as if it were on a ship's mast," he answered.

"Now, a little to the left of that."

He looked again, long and intently; this time he uttered a little cry of surprise.

"A green light, sliding up and down."

"Exactly," said Don José. "Now you can come along with us, and very soon you may see something that will, I think, astonish you."

He started through the gate to the roadway. The three of them fell into step together, heading in the opposite direction from Santa Palma, and toward the seaward end of the promontory. The road, winding at first through flat palmetto lands, gradually degenerated into a mere pathway of rough, unbroken stones. Presently they struck off on a narrow trail, leaving the pathway to the left. They were now near the tip of the peninsula, Everett guessed, and cutting across it toward the harbor mouth. The trail began to descend abruptly down a slope that was overgrown with a tangled mass of stunted palmettos. Far below, through the rising wraith of mist, he caught the faint gleam of a lamp shining upon placid water. Don José was silent, intent upon following the path; Tegel was, as usual, taciturn.

At last they reached the base of the slope and set foot upon a flat strip of beach. Everett's eyes, growing slowly accustomed to the darkness, detected the bulk of a small boat approaching the shore—and beyond it, out in the bay, the shadowy outline of what could only be a steamship at anchor.

They waited in silence upon the beach until, after what seemed to Everett an interminable time, they heard the gentle grounding of a keel upon the sand—perhaps fifty yards away; the mist in the mean-

time had grown thicker. Don José, followed by Tegel, hurried in the direction from which the sound had come, leaving Everett at the foot of the cliff to warn them instantly if he should hear anyone approaching through the palmetto undergrowth from above.

There reached his ears, as he stood there, the sound of heavy objects falling with a dull thud upon the beach and, at the same time, the mutterings of men engaged in a subdued argument. Someone lighted a dim, smoky oil lamp and held it high in the night air; shadowy forms began to pass swiftly in and out of the range of its feeble, yellow rays. He had a momentary glimpse of enormous, opaque masses lying in a row near the water's edge—packing cases. Don José, he saw too, through a rift in the mist, directing the workers with swift, sharp gestures of his arms.

And then another boat loomed up out of the thickening veil of gloom with silent, uncanny suddenness; and yet another. More men came ashore; more boxes. . . .

The work was carried on in complete silence, except for one instance when a man struggling with a heavy burden stumbled and fell; and through the obscurity of mist and darkness, mingled with the thud of the falling packing case, there came a faint but unmistakable rattle of metal against metal; steel against steel. Everett, at that sound, realized the true significance of it all; he heard Don José

reprimanding the man in a controlled yet scathing voice.

An hour must have passed. He grew immensely weary; sat down on the yielding sand—and with difficulty kept himself awake. At last the boats left, one by one; the rhythmic plashing of their oars died away in the distance. There ensued a profound stillness.

Don José and Tegel suddenly returned, and Everett felt a friendly hand upon his shoulder.

"Thank God, that's over," Don José muttered fervently, and turned to Tegel.

"You will, of course, remain here—until the carriers arrive at dawn."

In silence he and Everett climbed up the path and hurried inland to where a single panel of light shone from an upper story window of the Casa Azul. It was three o'clock when they entered the house, and as they came into the lighted hallway Everett saw upon Don José's face an expression of triumphant satisfaction.

"You are discreet," he said as they parted at the foot of the stairs. "You don't ask questions, as so many fools would do. For that reason, my young friend, I like you."

At dawn Everett was awakened by a confused medley of sound that slowly penetrated his sleep-laden senses. He rose and tiptoed out into the hall, stood at a window blinking at the sudden glory of the day. He saw, then, descending the road

that came winding through the palmettos from the seagirt tip of the peninsula, a string of primitive wooden waggons loaded, apparently, with pale green sugar cane, drawn by sleek black mules. The early morning air was loud with the crack of whips, the clump of heavy hoofs, the creak and groan of axles straining under some prodigious load.

The sugar cane, he mused sleepily, was excessively heavy; as he crept back into bed he suddenly chuckled aloud at the thought.

CHAPTER X

I

THE palpable pleasure with which Bianca Valdez had greeted his first visit to her lingered as a pleasant aftermath in Everett's mind, and he went soon again to see her. It was not long, indeed, before it became almost a daily custom of his to drop in at the villa for half an hour or so in the late afternoon. In the beginning she was to him a complete enigma, but as time went by he learned fragmentary details of her past life, which he tried to piece together in a coherent sequence.

When, at last, he had the complete story it set him to pondering, constantly, upon the immeasurable pathos of the destiny which had been shaped for her, and the quiet resignation with which she accepted the inevitable.

Bianca Valdez, only child of one Roderigo Rodriguez, a well-to-do tobacco planter and a half-brother of Don José, had, at the age of twenty-seven, come abruptly upon a stonewall drawn across the path of her life.

Her mother, the daughter of a proud French

royalist who had migrated to Martinique, had died at Bianca's birth. Her father, who adored her with the simple, complete devotion of a widower who found in his daughter a poignant reminder of all his wife's perfections, took her when she was barely fourteen years old to Paris, determined that she should have the best education the world could give. Always a man of keen perception as well as rare sentiment, he had a secret conviction that France was the only nation which would mould of his little girl a woman possessing that perfect blend of feminine qualities with which his wife had perpetually entranced him. . . . Six years these two lived in Paris—the happiest years of Bianca's life—and then Roderigo, one autumn, decided to pay a flying visit to Santa Palma that he might settle some matters of business connected with his plantation; Bianca went with him.

On the outward voyage Roderigo took ill; grew weaker as the ship sped southward into torrid, tropic seas. Before Santiago de Cuba, the first port of call was reached, he died; he was buried at sea.

Aboard the ship was one Carlo Valdez, captain of Esperanza infantry, a swarthy, dashing young man of twenty-eight who was returning to Santa Palma after a six months' leave in Spain. Before Roderigo had fallen ill he had begun to pay Bianca marked attentions; after his death he did not hesitate to urge his case the more. Never was

that close and dangerous affinity between love and love of sympathy so clearly demonstrated as when Bianca, twenty years old, alone and helpless, succumbed to the persistent entreaties of Valdez and agreed to marry him upon the ship's arrival in Santa Palma. There seemed, indeed, to be no other alternative. She was isolated and friendless, and had no idea where to go. She had not seen her Uncle José since she had been a tiny child; was not even sure that he was alive, or living in Esperanza.

They were married, and there followed three months of moderate happiness. Then Valdez was ordered with his regiment to the island colony of San Martino, some ninety miles off the Esperanza coast, where the government was having some trouble with insurrectionists. Valdez refused abruptly to take his wife with him. San Martino, he alleged was a hell hole—no place for a woman. He left her in a modest apartment on the outskirts of Santa Palma, where she agreed placidly to await his return, which it appeared would be in six months' time. Be it noted that Roderigo Rodriguez's fortune had, by now, following the Esperanzan laws, come completely in the hands of Valdez.

She never saw her husband again. He wrote her frequently in the beginning—and then, as time went by, less and less. At last a letter came to her a year after his departure, a rambling, almost in-

coherent letter whose phrases burned into her brain like torturing streams of fire. Valdez would never return—and, between the lines, and from hints of gossip that spread through Santa Palma, she gathered that he had become a victim of the climate and sordidness of San Martino; he had given himself completely to the life of dissipation that threatens the pioneers of isolated colonies throughout the world, when they despairingly seek oblivion from dread monotony. . . . Later on it developed that he had been dismissed from the army for failure in duty; that he had become a drunkard, was openly living in San Martino with a native woman. . . . Although Bianca might, even then, have been willing to forgive, nothing would induce him to return to Santa Palma. He had, too, her money.

There was no possibility of divorce for Bianca. Her church, as well as the inherent prejudices of her countrymen prevented that. She was condemned to an endless loyalty to one who had failed in the first test of his loyalty to her. What little money he had left with her gave out. Too proud to seek assistance, Don José at last discovered her in a condition of poverty, and took her to the empty villa adjacent to Casa Azul. He embarked upon the step with some misgiving, knowing that his cherished isolation was threatened, yet treated her with a courtesy and kindness that never once revealed this anxiety. She, on her part, did not

evinced by word or deed the despair that was in her heart. Eventually Don José, forced to admiration by her quiet resignation, became her friend and did his best to shield her from the prattle of malicious tongues.

The years passed. She lived the life of a recluse; found solace in books and music, and in the management of a small sugar plantation at the village of Cristobal which her father had left her and which had been overlooked by Valdez; this plantation enabled her, after some years, to pay back gratefully her obligations to Don José. He suggested that she could find distraction in travel, but she shrank from the thought of facing the world alone; Valdez's faithlessness always seemed to her, by some obscure reasoning of her sensitive mind, to be a reproach upon herself. Don José tried to convince her of the unreasonableness of this attitude, but failed. Hers was the gentler spirit of womanhood—she would never have wilfully hurt a human soul; she belonged to that accepting, trusting type of woman who, unless Fate treats her with a clement hand, is bound to be crushed and bruised by contact with life's severer tests.

II

She and Everett went riding one morning to the Cristobal plantation. Their mounts were lean, delicate-limbed young horses of the native breed,

nervous and none too sure-footed. The morning air—it was before breakfast—was still cool and fresh, and as they cantered along the winding sunlit trail that led to the distant hills Everett experienced a welcome sense of exhilaration, a tingling of the blood, a desire to shout aloud with the sheer, impatient joy of being alive. She, at his side, was superb upon her horse, he thought. She was wearing a simple khaki skirt and blouse, her face shielded from the sun's glare by a soft, wide-brimmed panama worn with unerring grace; beneath it he could see her black, gleaming hair waving softly over her ears, her slightly uptilted nose breathing in the cool fragrance of the morning. A faint flush had crept to the curve of her cheek; pleasure shone in her eyes. For once she had forgotten.

They crossed a low range of hills; descended with care a rock-strewn path into a cup-shaped valley whose gently undulating slopes were green with young sugar cane, dotted here and there with the squat, thatched bungalows of planters. At the foot of the descent they cantered through a sun-speckled grove of mangos, and emerged at the edge of a sluggish stream, through which their horses waded with a mincing, high-stepping timidity.

Beyond the stream they came upon a straight, flat road that was an invitation. They shook their horses to a gallop, abandoning themselves to the ecstasy of unrestrained flight. His horse nosed

slightly to the fore; head tossing; snorting with the eagerness of the open road.

Of a sudden he heard a sharp, terrified scream. He turned his head quickly to see Bianca's horse stumbling. In an instant she was lying queerly, horribly motionless in a crumpled khaki heap upon the blinding white road. . . . He reined up, heart leaping into his throat; dismounted. The horses cantered on together for a hundred yards or so down the road; then came to a halt in a state of aimless indecision.

He ran back; knelt down and took the motionless figure in his arms; turned her face to his. He had never, he thought, panic-stricken, seen such a deathly pallor. Her eyes were closed, the flesh beneath them tinged faintly blue. "Oh, God," he murmured; "Oh, God,"—again and again. . . . He found himself, as if in a nightmare, clambering down an embankment to the stream; dipping a handkerchief in the clear, cold water. Seconds seemed like minutes; minutes æons of time. . . .

As he bathed her—white brow her eyelids fluttered, slowly opened. She gazed at him with a dull, uncomprehending stare. Her arm moved upward in a feeble gesture, then dropped limply. She muttered something which he could not understand.

For what seemed ages he knelt there, holding her in his arms; trying desperately, frantically to revive her. And then, at last, the stark stare left her eyes, to be replaced by complete comprehension.

"I'm not hurt," she murmured, and her lips trembled into a valiant smile, "—only, only stunned."

But one arm, flung limply about his neck, tightened and a spasm of pain twisted her mouth. She seemed, just then, very near to him, and very helpless.

"It's all right," he assured her hopefully. "—I'll take care of you; I'll get you home—don't worry."

She smiled again. A kind of hazy tenderness filled her eyes. Something of the vividness of her proximity overwhelmed him suddenly; and in a wave of mingled tenderness, passion and thankfulness, he leaned swiftly forward and kissed her trembling lips. Her arm, for one brief instant, tightened perceptibly about his neck, in a seemingly grateful caress.

She stood up then, quickly and nervously; brushed the dust from her habit. Only her elbow, it seemed, had been painfully wrenched. He recovered the horses, helped her to mount, and they rode homeward, side by side, in silence. His head was lowered, his gaze fixed pensively upon the road. Only once did she glance at him, and then her eyes were ashine with a strange, new brightness.

The allurements of Everett's youth and eagerness; his freshness of outlook and his enthusiasm, had—if he had but known it—broken in upon the monotony of her existence like a breath of life-giving

air upon a fading flower. Daily she had waited for the hour of his visit to her with a growing pleasure and expectancy. He had brought to her, unknowing, one ray of hope that gleamed through the dreary, gray future to which she had steeled herself. And now, tempestuously, in that fleeting kiss he had given her came the culmination of hope, the conviction that she could still find happiness—in being young, and in being in love. The tragedy of those ended years of wasted beauty seemed to her to have been swept away on the wings of the morning; in one swift moment she had found her youth and vanished dreams restored to her. . . .

III

She was outwardly calm when they reached the villa, and invited him to remain for luncheon. Although she, of course, avoided reference to what had occurred he sensed that their relations had undergone a subtle change. Several times he caught her looking at him, furtively, a half-puzzled, half-tender expression in her eyes; and he realized of a sudden, that things could not be as they had been before—that their frank comradeship had gone. In its place there had crept a certain uneasiness, intangible but wholly apparent; a diffidence in his conversation, a shyness in her replies.

A relief from the tension came after lunch when she appeared on the terrace with a copy of *El*

Tiempo, the local journal of Santa Palma. She sat down beside him.

"There are some things I don't understand at all," she began gravely. "Listen to this, while I read it to you."

Everett waited, smiling; he had already guessed what she was about to read to him.

"Here it is—'An Extraordinary Note to President Pinar from the Planter José Rodriguez,' it is headed; and then follows this article:—'We have learned from a high authority that our illustrious President, Alvarez Pinar, has today received a communication of a most extraordinary and unpleasant nature from the well-known planter José Rodriguez. In this note Rodriguez demands the instant court-martial and execution of Captain Tomas Secor of the President's Guard for what he terms "the wicked and unwarranted assassination of Señor Vlasco Corcovado, secretary to His Excellency Don José Rodriguez, President of the Liberationist Party of Esperanza." The note, moreover, concludes by saying that if Secor is not executed and an apology is not forthcoming for his action, the Liberationist Party pledges itself to avenge the death of its dearly beloved and illustrious comrade. It is learned that the receipt of this note has caused a furor in the President's Palace, and that Rodriguez will be severely dealt with for his temerity.'—Now what do you think of that, Everett?"

He laughed outright.

"It sounds even better than I had imagined," he exclaimed. "That note was dictated to me by Don José and sent by special messenger to the Palace. I'll bet they're shaking in their shoes up at the *Fortaleza*."

"They sound defiant," she murmured dubiously.

"That's pure bluff. Besides, *El Tiempo* is practically owned by Pinar's crowd. As a matter of fact, they won't know what to do. They'd never dare execute Secor for fear of antagonizing the whole army; and they're deadly afraid of Don José. They know, too, that the murder of Corcovado was a brutal crime."

She frowned; then spoke with some asperity.

"This note of Don José's," she asserted, tapping the newspaper, "is merely a flimsy excuse for war. It need never have been sent. Pinar cannot climb down, or he would not have a shred of respect left in the eyes of the people. Don José must have foreseen that."

"Of course it's only an excuse," he assured her, enthusiastically, "but it's a very good one. Corcovado's death gave Don José the very opportunity he wanted. He feels that the time is now ripe to save the country from the rotten state it's falling into, and he's brought things to a crisis—that's all there is to it."

She did not immediately answer. For some moments she gazed toward the harbor with a wist-

ful stare, eventually to give a little shrug of resignation.

"It seems," she said, "as if men were always trying to make trouble, were ready to fly at one another's throats upon the slightest pretext. Oh—if we could only have peace! You don't know what these revolutions are like; you who up north read of them in your newspapers and laugh. You don't hear of the wounded men; the streets soaked in blood—and then, afterwards, fever and horrible disease sweeping over the island——"

She turned to him in a little burst of fury.

"Even you, young as you are, you're guilty. You're ready, even anxious for this orgy of murder which is bound to come. You've listened to Don José's eloquence and, like a perfect little fool, you're ready to play your part in a tragedy that doesn't concern you in the least. I had hoped——"

Her voice wavered, broke to an almost incoherent whisper:

"—I had hoped that, possibly, you and I might enjoy some happy hours together—and now even that is to be spoiled. And then, very likely, you may be wounded. Being with Don José you're bound to be in the thick of everything; he is at least courageous. —Oh, please, for God's sake, think better of it!"

Her passionate outburst left him momentarily speechless, amazed. Clumsily he leaned forward

and took her hand in his, where it lay limp and unresisting.

"I can't back out of it now," he told her. "That's impossible."

Very quietly he arose, touched his lips to her fingers, and walked away down the garden path. His mind was in a chaotic state. So many things happening—so swiftly . . . and over all he was haunted by an enduring, persistent vision of her lying helpless in his arms, of that sudden, unforgettable kiss. He reached the gate in the bourgainvillea-sprayed wall, paused irresolutely, then retraced his steps toward the villa. But she had gone indoors, was nowhere to be seen.

IV

Don José was in festive mood that night. He, Tegel, and Everett dined together in the Casa Azul, and to celebrate the sending of the note to Pinar he ordered champagne to be brought up from the cellars.

"To the *Valientes!*" he cried, raising his glass. "May God support their cause."

There were other toasts, too, for the future prosperity of Esperanza—and one to Don José himself, proposed by Tegel who had apparently forgotten his taciturnity for the occasion. Toward the end of dinner, however, a sense of seriousness descended upon them all, so that they ate and drank in silence.

At nine o'clock Don José rose from the table.

"In a very few days," he said, "Pinar's reply will come. That it will be in the nature of a refusal I am sure. You, Gail, have already proved of value to me; I have decided that you will take part in the Revolution as my personal *aide*—so prepare yourself for an interesting time, and perhaps some bloodshed. Until the hour comes you will see little of me; I am going about the country—in disguise, of course—conferring with my brave agents. You will, yourself, remain here and await orders. Until then—adieu."

He left the room; Tegel, nodding abruptly to Everett, followed him. The door closed softly behind them.

Left alone, Everett found himself suddenly pervaded by an untold exhilaration. His senses, he discovered, were acutely sharpened, his mind incredibly active. He seemed to be able to reach conclusions with an unnatural, uncanny ease . . . perhaps it was the wine; or the subtle fragrance of the night; or the shadow of impending events. . . . He left the dining room, strolled down the marble steps that led to the garden. A white, symmetrical moon shone down with dazzling intensity between the slender black columns of the palms. Beyond the ghostly outline of the garden wall he could glimpse a yellow parallelogram of light, shining from a window in Bianca's villa.

Half way across the garden he was halted by the sound of a woman's voice, singing, low and tremu-

lous; the faint tinkle of a piano reached his ears. As in a dream he lifted the latch of the gateway in the wall, and continued toward the villa.

He knocked gently, and the sound of his knuckles upon the paneled surface of the door seemed to reach him remotely, from a great distance.

When he had waited, heart hammering, for what seemed an eternity of time, the door was slowly opened. She stood before him, clad in a fragile black evening gown, her tender profile vaguely outlined in the mellow light of a hallway lantern that hung, pendulous, from brass chains. A hand was poised, startled, upon her small yet frankly curving bosom. He marvelled, momentarily, at the white perfection of her shoulders, in unmitigated contrast to the lacy blackness of her dress.

"You," she said. That was all; but he was aware, almost triumphantly, that there was no trace of reproval in her voice; only a little catch of—could it be, happiness.

For a while he stood there silent before her; and then—at last—held her in his arms, while her lips murmured soft, incoherent little phrases in his ears, and her slim white arms about his neck were a caress in themselves. He caught her, suddenly, warm and yielding, to him; saw her lips, half open, smiling up at him in a mute, irresistible appeal.

In the depths of her hazel eyes, too, he saw the inexorable.



Book III



CHAPTER I

I

THE Casa Azul became, during the days that followed, a silent, almost deserted place. Don José was away, roaming about the island, and Everett received no news of him. Sometimes Tegel would appear unexpectedly to pass an hour or two at the house, spoke little to Everett, and when he did, vouched no the heap of mail that invariably awaited him. He spoke little to Everett, and when he did, vouched no information. It was understood, however, that Don José's plans were now complete and awaiting only the spark that would start the conflagration.

Life, at this time, assumed for Everett a leisurely enchantment, an opulence that he had not before conceived possible. He lived through the hours with a perpetual sense of unreality; the commonplaces of everyday existence were tinted with something of the magic of dreams. There were rides with Bianca in the coolness of early morning to the foothills beyond Cristobal, through the emerald coffee groves whose berries were now beginning to turn crisply red as the sun gained daily in strength; luncheons in

the noonday stillness of the villa—entrancing meals served upon a table ornate with damask and the sparkle of cut glass; long, drowsy afternoons in the profound languor of the shady garden, whilst he looked over her books, and she embroidered; both of them rather quiet, happy in the mere consciousness of each other's proximity. Or perhaps, late in the afternoon they would seek the coolness of the living room, while she sat at the piano and her tremulous contralto vibrating through the golden dusk would set nameless pangs stirring at his heart. And then, most perfect of all, the evenings spent in the blue shadows of the verandah where there was a serene stillness, broken only by the lyric rustling of palm fronds in the gentle breeze, the occasional and subdued stirring of the cockatoo upon its swinging perch. A glimpse of the starlit sea through a fret-work of leaves, while Bianca's cool hands smoothed his rumpled hair, murmured endearing little phrases that awed him—made him feel utterly young, and vaguely ashamed, too, that anyone should so love him. . . .

As he grew to know her well he found himself, oddly enough, contrasting her with Margaret Blair. In age there was some eight years difference; Margaret stood for the splendid near future, Bianca for the glorious actuality. Bianca had a certain stability, a steadiness of purpose which Margaret had yet to attain; the impetuosity of youth, alert and seeking, had in her been supplanted by a deep tranquillity

of spirit, a perfection of philosophic calm. Margaret was the bud, Bianca the full-blown flower. . . . And then again, to Bianca life seemed an easily-read book; she was constantly, if wholly unconsciously, bringing to light some aspect of his own immaturity which laughingly caused her pleasure and made him youthfully uncomfortable.

"Dear Everett," she would say in her lazy, pretty drawl, her great eyes searching his, "you are so very young. You have brought me back all, all my youth—just being with you."

A frown might flicker across her brow as she asked herself for perhaps the hundredth time how long it would last. Inwardly she was already dreading the day when the shining eagerness in his eyes upon seeing her would fail. Too intelligent to overestimate even the power of her charms, she succeeded in making a gentle appeal to his sympathies as well as his senses.

She displayed, in their new intimacy, a complexity of character, an infinite variety of moods that puzzled him, yet held him entranced by their very vagaries. She was cool, almost scornful, at times; then at once sweetly humble and surrendering. Because she was the product of centuries of the finest old blood and bone it was the very refinement of her, perhaps, that held him captivated. An acute delicacy of expression was so inherent a part of her being that even in her eager love for him every act, every declaration was tinged with a fine thread of

restraint that sustained, more than anything else, his admiration. His uncomplex mind, still imbued subconsciously with certain stolid old Anglo-Saxon ideas of convention, could not reconcile the completeness of her physical surrender to him with the fact that she was ever a gentlewoman of the most perfect and delicate mould imaginable. . . .

"When it is all over," she once remarked gravely to him through the twilight, "you must not think wrong of yourself, or of me. It is only the fools who blame themselves for the irrevocable past."

"Why do you speak of its being all over?" he asked her with a display of impatience. "—it's cynical, horrible, to look ahead and foresee things like that." But there was, none the less, a shade of fear in his voice as he recognized, in spite of his desire to ignore it, the unerring truth of her perception.

"Because someday, maybe very soon, it will be over—just a memory," she answered. "Nothing, least of all a particular form of happiness, endures—

*'Toute votre félicité,
Sujette à l'instabilité,
En moins de rien tombe par terre;
Et comme elle a l'éclat de verre,
Elle en a la fragilité'*

"—Corneille put the truth so beautifully, didn't he?"

And in the little laugh that followed there was the faintest touch of bitterness.

It was in just such moods as this that she baffled him.

II

New York and his past life had by now attained a dim remoteness in his mind. Absorbed by the new phase of existence in which he suddenly found himself, he had difficulty in summoning to his mind the merest echo of the past. He had written, during his first week at the Casa Azul, a letter to his mother, reassuringly stating that he had found the West Indies to his liking—that he was well—and happy. To this he presently received an amiable, characteristic reply that concluded with a certain note of resignation. “Your father and I are glad that you seem contented. Everything at home—business especially—is still very unsettled; P. says he doesn’t see any possible business opening for you at present. I’m having the most dreadful time with servants. . . . Personally, I must say I don’t see what amusement or interest you can find in being chauffeur to one of those Brazilians (her geography was always delightfully vague)—but then you always did have such quaint ideas, Evvy dear!”

And a postscript: “You will be glad to hear that Stoddard has just won the Boston Architectural League’s prize for the best design of a Colonial house. We are all exceedingly proud of him. . . .”

This letter of his mother's set him to pondering. Stoddard, as usual, was magnetizing the family with his successes, and this effectually prevented them from focusing their attention upon himself. It was evident that they regarded him, Everett, their first-born, in the light of an anomaly, which it was wiser not to interfere with—a problem beyond their powers, as normal parents, to solve. They were not in the least angry with him, he felt—the dear, lovable souls—only disappointed. He knew that Stoddard had exceeded their greatest expectations while he, himself, had failed to come up to them.

His philosophy was somewhat embittered by this reasoning. His mother, of course, loved him still in that wonderfully serene, unquestioning way that good mothers always seemed to love their sons, but it was easy to see that all her hope and pride was now centered in Stoddard.

He did not feel, under the circumstances, any immediate urge to return home. There was nothing to compel him to leave Santa Palma, where life suddenly offered innumerable interests, where the near future was potent with those glowing prospects of adventure and activity that were, to him, the very breath of life. But, although he had not yet realized the fact, it was Bianca, really, whose supreme magnetism abruptly banished from his mind all thoughts of the past—and even of the future. With her the radiant present was all-sufficing.

III

Don José returned to the Casa Azul at midnight on the twelfth day of his absence. He summoned Everett immediately to his library. Everett found him pacing up and down the room, hands clasped behind his back; he appeared nervous and tired, yet elation shone in his eyes.

"Everything is ready," he said, after formally greeting him. "My followers await only the signal. I have divided the country into four areas for my campaign—north, south, east and west. Each area is in the hands of a trusted leader. We can count, I find, on about twenty-five thousand men in all, moderately well trained, as against ten or twelve thousand highly trained Federalist soldiers. Our support is assured at Los Barrios, where we will strike the first blow. Santa Palma will probably swing to our cause as soon as our other victories are announced. Only Rivadavia, in the east, remains a doubtful factor. Now if you will listen carefully I will outline my plan.

"As soon as Pinar refuses our demands, which he will of course do, our attack shall begin simultaneously at the four most important towns on the island—Santa Palma, Los Barrios, Rivadavia and Manzanillo in the west. In less than forty-eight hours, I believe, these four towns will be completely in our hands."

He paused to unfold a large map; tapped upon it

with a pencil, indicating a certain patch of pale green.

"Here, you see, is what we call the Vega Real, an upland plain some six kilometers south of Santa Palma. It is the principal strategic position upon the whole island because it commands the road between Santa Palma and Los Barrios, and also the narrow-gauge railway to Rivadavia. Artillery carefully placed at this point would dominate Santa Palma.

"Continuing my plan—I propose, at one move, to cut all communication between north and south by occupying the Vega Real and, in case we meet with resistance, to shell the government buildings of Santa Palma from this point. Meanwhile our other *Valientes*, having met with success in the south, east and west, will march northward to this Vega Real and reinforce those attacking Santa Palma."

He talked, on and on, through the small hours of the morning, inculcating into Everett not a little of his own growing enthusiasm.

In the dim grayness of dawn, just as they were about to retire, the door opened swiftly and Tegel glided into the room. In Don José's hands he placed an oblong envelope, and there was upon his uncompromising features the faintest trace of an ironical smile.

"There is your answer from Pinar," he announced. "Instead of complying with your demands he threatens you with arrest and imprison-

ment if you do not leave the republic of Esperanza forever within twenty-four hours."

Don José, after a moment of incredulous amazement, burst into such a roar of laughter that his massive frame shook and tears came welling into his eyes.

"They have spoken," he said, abruptly restraining his mirth. "The voice of our rifles will be the best answer that we can give to these conceited puppets."

CHAPTER II

I

REMEMBERING that it was Saturday afternoon and, consequently, that a new issue of *The Two Hemispheres* would be on sale, Winthrop Blair stopped at the news stand on the gusty corner of Madison Avenue and Fifty-Ninth Street, on his way home from the club, and purchased a copy of that estimable but somewhat colorless publication. On his arrival at the stolid square brownstone house that had been the Blair residence for two generations, he dropped into an armchair and began to turn over the closely-printed, unillustrated pages of the review with an air of quiet stoicism. His wife had suggested some weeks previously that he was not sufficiently *au courant* (she was fond of imported phrases) with public affairs of the present day, and as his principal aim in life was to placate Ella Blair he conscientiously imposed upon himself this weekly task of perusing a publication that incredibly bored him—his own personal choice in literature wavering between *Life* and *Judge*, and detective stories about mysterious houses with haunted rooms and

drawn blinds. He was a neat, wiry little man with thin pink cheeks and skimpy, faded brown hair which was parted with extreme preciseness upon a rather finely shaped head. His dark gray sack suit, patent leather shoes, and pearl gray cravat of the richest Spittlefield silk proclaimed a certain inherent good taste that was noticeable only for its unobtrusiveness. As he sat reading *The Two Hemispheres* he tugged at his well-clipped gray mustache and his forehead became puckered with a mild frown.

He had been reading about ten minutes when he heard the front door open; he laid the magazine carefully down upon a table and glanced toward the door, welcoming the interruption with considerable relief. He had found *The Two Hemispheres* more tedious than ever, if possible, this week. . . .

Ella Blair, active yet ponderous, clad in an elaborate plum-colored afternoon dress and hat with nodding ostrich plumes, swept into the drawing room with the majesty of a full-rigged ship; her large, usually placid face wore an expression of outraged dignity. Winthrop Blair rose to meet her with a nervous little cough.

"I was reading this week's *Two Hemispheres*, my dear," he said with a palpable effort at casualness, "—splendid article about The Necessity of Adjusting Foreign Exchange."

His wife placed a gold mesh reticule and limp white gloves upon the veneered surface of a table, and sank with a soft, swishing sound into an arm-

chair beside him. He realized with an unpleasant sense of foreboding that she had been crossed in her will. Ella Blair's amiability was a thing wholly dependent upon her having her own way—and as most people gave in to her wishes she had, like many women of her type, gained an undeserved reputation of being one of the most good-natured creatures in the world.

Twenty-two years before Ella Boyne had made up her mind, with a quite amazing and cynical deliberation for one so young, to marry dapper little Winthrop Blair, whose neat good looks and shy, pleasing manners would, she thought, form an amicable background to her social progress. Their married life proved to be a harmonious, well-ordered process of existence. New York knew them in winter; Bar Harbor in summer. That women invariably referred to them as "Ella Blair and her husband," and men scarcely referred to him at all, is perhaps the most illuminating comment that can be made upon their mutual happiness and characteristics.

Upon this particular afternoon the knowledge that something had occurred to upset visibly his wife's equanimity made Winthrop Blair vaguely angry with the unknowns who had been responsible. He stirred uneasily in his chair, waiting for her to begin—as he knew she would begin.

"I've got to talk to you about Margaret," she said suddenly.

This frankly startled him. His wife rarely con-

sulted him on any matter; least of all concerning their daughter. That was an affair supposed to be entirely in her hands. Moreover, he disliked discussing family intimacies; it seemed, somehow, crude.

"I've just been," his wife continued, with a rising inflection of her thin voice, "to Mrs. Beekman Jones' to tea. She sent for me suddenly—why, I couldn't imagine, until I got there. However—here's the story. I suppose you've realised that Margaret's been running around a good deal with Hal Jones, her son?"

He replied negligently that he had gathered something to that effect, from chance remarks of Margaret herself.

"I was pleased," Mrs. Blair went on, "—quite pleased. He is a nice boy with beautiful manners, and a remarkable education. He was so valuable during the War, in fact, that they took him into the something-or-other Food Commission instead of the army. A girl like Margaret, you know, won't stay unmarried for long; we must realise that. And so I thought— Well, I thought that Hal Jones would be eminently suitable. He's so nice; he never omits to come up and have a little chat with me at dances. They've money too, and their position is of course assured——"

She broke off, surveying her husband with piercing intensity.

"For Heaven's sake, Winthrop. Say something, won't you?"

"I want Margaret to marry whoever she wishes," he said gently, "—as long as the man's decent and respectable."

She wrung her hands helplessly.

"Oh Winthrop, Winthrop, you'll be the death of me yet—such elementary ideas. Now listen to what has happened. I found Mrs. Beekman Jones in her drawing room, and in quite a rage. She opened fire on me immediately. My dear, I hardly had time to sit down before she launched forth. Hardly decent, I thought—still, you know that her marriage completely turned her head. . . . I was so nervous that I spilled my tea, and nearly ruined this dress. She said that Margaret had been encouraging Hal, leading him on month after month, and that the poor boy was desperately in love with her. Last night, it seems, they went to a restaurant in Forty-Second Street after the Junior Assembly and there, because he couldn't wait any longer, he proposed to her. She turned him down flatly. And when he asked for a reason, what *do* you think she said?"

"What did she say, my dear?" Winthrop asked in an awe-inspired voice. Anything that Margaret said or did went unquestioned with him; she was perfection. Indeed, he never actually ceased to wonder that this superb, beautiful creature could be his own daughter.

"She said—" Mrs. Blair enunciated each word slowly and with dramatic emphasis, "—she said that 'there was another'!"

"Ah!" said Winthrop Blair, and smiled furtively.

"Of all people—that useless, scatterbrained Gail boy!"

Winthrop Blair was surprised; he sat up straight in his chair. Yet he continued to smile; he was thinking of the outraged Mrs. Beekman Jones, and her overmannered son whom he secretly detested. What was it that the young people called him in their peculiar modern slang? A—a lounge lizard—yes, that was it. . . .

"Gail's a manly fellow, after all," he ventured. "Young Jones isn't the husband I'd pick for Margaret. He seems to spend eighteen hours out of the twenty-four dancing——"

"You're wandering from the point," his wife interrupted with some asperity. "Gail never proposed to Margaret—at least she's never told me so. And she apparently cares for him; the dreadful part of it all is that she told it to Hal Jones. I can't think where her pride is. Now when I was a girl——"

"My dear," he interrupted with unusual insistence, "please do not let us make that fatal, timeworn mistake of comparing the habits of our generation with theirs. The more of our traditions they can discard the happier they seem to be. The frank confidences of an early morning breakfast in a buckwheat establishment after a dance were unknown to us. We can hardly judge——"

There was a twinkle in his eyes that puzzled her; she had momentary fear that his sense of humor had

attained some subtle depth beyond her own capacity.

"You have such queer streaks in you at times," she protested; and then, to his utter discomfort, a large tear rolled down her fleshy cheek.

"I—I want Margaret to be happy," she said, with a truly wonderful inconsistency.

II

Margaret came in late that afternoon from a shopping expedition, very tired, laden down with packages. Mrs. Blair followed her to her bedroom.

"Mrs. Beekman Jones has told me all," she announced theatrically as Margaret took off her hat, glanced at herself in the mirror and frowned. Margaret darted her a look of puzzled incomprehension.

"Oh," she said with a forced little laugh, flinging herself into a chair, "—you mean about Hal's proposing? It was positively a *scream*, wasn't it?" And then, seeing her mother's expression, added hastily: "Surely that didn't upset you, did it, Mother?"

Mrs. Blair sat down too; folded her hands in her lap.

"Well—I hardly know what to say, to tell you the truth. Of course, I couldn't help noticing your going about with Hal Jones week after week, but I said nothing. What he did was perhaps only natural, in view of the encouragement you gave him."

Margaret's eyes grew widely incredulous.

"Why, Mother—you don't, you couldn't mean that you thought that I'd ever *marry* Hal Jones?"

She was utterly genuine in her astonishment, but the half-nervous, half-scornful little smile that came to her lips aroused her mother's indignation.

"He's not to be sneered at, my dear child—even if you don't like him. He has everything that one would require. Of course—" she was suddenly flustered, ill at ease under Margaret's coolness, "—of course I can't discuss this kind of thing in such a cold-blooded way; it would be indelicate, to say the least. But—" she concluded with a triumphant note—"but I must say that I think you dismissed him in an awfully abrupt, casual sort of way. At least, if you were positive you could never care for him—" Mrs. Blair never employed the word "love"; it had a common twang to it, she thought "—if you were positive, you might have given the poor boy some reason, after trotting around with him all these weeks."

Margaret stood up, clasped her hands behind her back and spoke with careful deliberation.

"But, Mother dear, I did give him a reason. As for trotting around with him—why, I supposed it amused him just as much as it did me. He's a wonderful dancer and talks amusingly, but no one ever took him seriously—except as a provider of a pleasant hour or two. He's not even original; he's one of those people who love to say a good thing without

taking the trouble of inventing it.—The reason I gave for refusing his—his offer, was that I loved Everett Gail.”

“Everett Gail!”

Mrs. Blair flushed unbecomingly.

“You mean to say that you actually told Hal Jones that you were in love with that Gail boy? Good gracious, Margaret, what *has* come over you? Did young Gail ever propose to you?”

“No, indeed. But he would without a doubt, if I encouraged him sufficiently.”

“This is most distressing to hear. Where is the boy now?”

“He’s down in the West Indies somewhere, roaming around. But he’ll be back. I can wait.”

“I should think you *could* wait!”

Thoroughly aroused, her mother rose from the chair and began to pace nervously up and down the room. She spoke rapidly:

“I don’t know what the world’s coming to—young girls running about telling young men that they’re in love with other young men, who haven’t even proposed to them. It’s positively indecent——”

“There’s no harm in being in love,” Margaret interposed gently.

“Perhaps not—but one doesn’t scream it from the housetops. Besides, this Gail boy is hopeless. His family are all right in their way—nice, stodgy old things, but they can’t do anything with him. His mother as much as told me so herself.”

"They don't understand him——"

"If they can't, no one else can."

Margaret came up to her, put her arms about her neck.

"Please," she pleaded. "Can't we avoid discussing this—this kind of thing. You don't know Everett; you can't judge by what people say. He's really got more to him than all the rest of his friends put together. He has a little germ of restlessness in his system that he has to get rid of; that's all."

Mrs. Blair was still dubious, but somewhat mollified. She pecked swiftly at Margaret's cheek.

"There—I'm sorry if I spoke crossly. We'll drop the matter for the present. As I told your father a few minutes ago, I only want to see you happy."

And she bustled out of the room, her mind already absorbed in other matters. She had suddenly remembered about a dinner that she was giving that night . . . the flowers had not arrived yet. Margaret heard her thin voice, complaining down the hall; the English butler trying, stiffly, to appease her.

The door of her room opened and her father peered in, his bright little eyes blinking over the tops of his pince-nez.

"Can I come in, Margaret?"

"Why of course, Father."

He tiptoed up to her, kissed her, and tiptoed away again. At the door he paused irresolutely, his hand upon the fragile glass handle.

"Don't be angry with your mother," he whis-

pered; and jerked his head nervously over his shoulder toward the distant sound of his wife's voice. "She was—a little bit disappointed about the Jones' business. I'm afraid she had false hopes—but she wants you to be happy. We all do. Between ourselves, I never could stand that Jones boy myself. His father was a conceited, overdressed ass—made a great hullabaloo over town about his coaches, and couldn't even drive a four-in-hand properly. . . ."

He went away, chuckling softly to himself.

Margaret felt a little lump rising in her throat.

CHAPTER III

I

THOSE young *caballeros* of Santa Palma whose habit it was to take their after dinner coffee at the Bodega de Madrid in the arcade of the Plaza Nacional were accustomed to seeing there nightly a certain mild-looking old man with a rotund, cylindrical figure; an old man who always wore the same badly-creased suit of pongee, the unbuttoned coat of which revealed a damp, crinkled expanse of silken-clad stomach; the color of the silk had long since departed, the starched cuffs of the shirt were frayed like the edge of a fine saw. He was invariably there, night after night at the same marble-topped table, pathetically making one meagre cup of coffee last through the evening, and constantly fanning his moist bald head with a disreputable Panama. No one ever spoke to him except the waiter—and, occasionally, the proprietor of the Bodega. He appeared to have no friends, but his eyes were ever alert, searching the crowds about him, taking in every minor incident of the evening. Indeed, his astonishing interest in life seemed almost oddly at

variance with his own appearance of exhausted vitality. A lonely, rather helpless old creature, the *caballeros* decided, an *Americano* obviously, and one who had seen better days.

His name, although the *caballeros* did not know it, was Elbert Wing. Had they heard it they would have been none the wiser, for in the days that he had attained his glory they were being weaned. Elbert Wing's dispatches from Manilla during the Spanish-American War had been eagerly scanned by thousands; newspapers fought for him. In his time he had been known from the Battery to the 'Frisco Embarcadero as a journalist of the highest calibre.

Lifted to sudden fame through a chain of fortunate circumstances, he perhaps acquired a reputation that was beyond human capabilities to sustain. His work was little more than mediocre in the Russo-Japanese conflict, but he succeeded in acquiring some notoriety through his Balkan dispatches of 1912—his account of Kirk Kilisse is still remembered in Fleet Street as well as Park Row. It was, in fact, not until 1917 that his actual downfall took place. As special correspondent for the Independent Press he roamed about Russia for eighteen months, and presently found himself in the thick of the Revolution. And then, in the morass of conflicting political issues which followed the Kerensky débâcle he lost his self-confidence; there became apparent in his work a certain growing diffusion, a lack of conviction in what he had to state. McCarthy of the

Independent ultimately consigned his dispatches to the waste basket with tears in his eyes, and cabled his recall.

For sentiment's sake they sent him on a patriotic round of the National Army Cantonments in the autumn of 1917, but his elaborate work no longer pleased an impatient public. To be able to write superb English was one thing, but to grip the imagination of a war-trammeled people in the newer journalistic style of apt and flippant phrasing was another—and beyond his powers.

He disappeared. Park Row missed him for a month; then forgot all about him. As a matter of fact, he had embarked on a tour of the West Indies to write a series of articles for an ingratiating travel agency which was financially tottering. When he reached Santa Palma the agency went suddenly defunct; his services were no longer required. The financial results of his career, or what remained of them, were in a wallet upon his person. This was diminished by a siege of typhoid, which he barely pulled through.

He lingered on week after week at Santa Palma, ambitionless and broken-hearted. He hired an attic bedroom above the Bodega de Madrid, a place of sawdust, sloppy tables and gambling machines, whose atmosphere was perpetually pungent with stale Cuban tobacco. Life assumed something of the grotesqueness of a prolonged nightmare; it was only in his dreams that he lived in a semblance of reality.

Yet he remained there, knowing full well that in the North he could not exist on the pitiful sum he still possessed.

He had been in Santa Palma two months when he first heard whispers of a possible political upheaval; it was said that José Rodríguez, the planter, was a mortal enemy of the Pinar government, that he was angered at their apparent intention to rule Esperanza until eternity. Wing had, during his travels, picked up enough Spanish to enable him to hold jerky little conversations with his landlord—the Bodega proprietor; moreover he read *El Tiempo* daily. The increasing rumors of a revolution did not at first arouse his interest, for to one who had seen the passes of Galicia crowded with dying thousands, a tinsel uprising on an island of palm trees was to be regarded as a farce. It was the death of Corcovado, which he happened to witness through the open doors of the *Teatro Municipal*, that opened his eyes to the remarkable state of affairs in Esperanza, and at the same time revived his dying interest in the world about him.

He underwent a transformation; he felt once more the old craving for excitement; the zest of life; the urge to seek news, irrepressible and tumultuous within him, that had once carried him to a short-lived fame. He sat up the whole of the night in his attic bedroom under the flickering light of a candle, penning an article concerning the death of Corcovado and the circumstances, political and

otherwise, that had led up to it. Having no cable facilities at his disposal he was obliged to mail it to New York.

McCarthy of the Independent Press received the article; read it, amazed, as if he were scanning a document from the grave. Wing's last paragraph said: "Strangely enough José Rodriguez has a young American as his chauffeur. The lad made an attempt to avenge Corcovado's death in the lobby of the theatre, but was held back by someone in the crowd. . . ." McCarthy cut the article down to two dozen lines for publication, but sent a cheque covering the whole of it to Santa Palma; he was a man who was accustomed to reading between lines, and the feebleness of Wing's handwriting was eloquent.

The presence of this young American on the staff of Don José interested Wing not a little; the more he gave the matter consideration the more curious he became. Eventually he summoned the remnants of his old-time aggressiveness and plodded up the winding road to the Casa Azul, determined to obtain an interview either from the American boy or Rodriguez himself. He did not succeed in even entering the house. An irascible negro servant, on hearing the nature of his mission, slammed the door in his face. He tried again a week later, with equal unsuccess, and his second failure plunged him into such depths of depression that on his return to the Bodega he proceeded to consume cheap

cognac with cynical deliberation until all his sorrows were mercifully obliterated. His amiable landlord, assisted by the waiter, carried him upstairs at midnight and tenderly put him to bed.

II

As the days went by the bodega gossip of political strife subsided, but Elbert Wing, with his inherent faculty of sensing the barometer of public thought, knew what was in the air; knew that this was but the calm that precedes the storm. The timely arrival of McCarthy's cheque counteracted the depression that followed his failure at the Casa Azul, and revived again his drooping spirits. He waited eagerly for developments.

Late in the evening of the third Sunday in January, as he sat at his accustomed table outside the Bodega, his attention was attracted by a crowd that was rapidly gathering before the doors of the *Intendencia*. It was an orderly crowd, almost motionless, as if stricken to immobility in the sudden comprehension of some tremendous fact. He left his table and made his way into the throng. A uniformed official, he discovered, was pasting some kind of bulletin upon the plaster walls of the building. The crowd swayed, jostled; a confused murmur of voices arose. Over the shoulders of those in front of him he caught a glimpse of hurriedly stencilled words:

Revolutionists, acting in the name of José Rodríguez, attacked the garrison at Los Barrios late this afternoon. Desperate fighting is taking place. Federalist troops still dominate the situation. Seventeen of the rebels have been killed.

Citizens of Santa Palma. Remain loyal to your Government, and these insurgents will be soon crushed!

—HONORIO TAQUIN, *Alcalde*.

So it had come at last. . . . Lost in thought he allowed himself to be propelled along in a relentless tide of humanity, increasing by the minute, that was drifting—seemingly impelled by some mutual yet unpremeditated urge—toward the twin panels of light that marked the wide-flung doors of the Cathedral at the end of the Plaza. Up the steps the human torrent swept him, and into the lofty, narrow knave that was ablaze with slender candles, fragrant with the odor of burning incense. Already the high-backed pews of sombre mahogany were filled by a silent congregation kneeling at prayer; row upon row, almost as far as the eye could see, of hatless, white-clad men; women and young girls in the gaudiest of cotton dresses, their bowed heads decorously covered with mantillas of the most intricate lace. Away beyond the silent, kneeling multitude towered an altar of azure and gold, surmounted with garish crucifixes of painted plaster, candlesticks of burnished silver, a profusion

of artificial roses—the whole a blazing, awesome tabernacle of light and color. . . . The chant of a priest came floating down the hushed spaces of the nave, faint and drowsy with distance. . . . *Ora pro nobis.* . . .

He found a vacant and inconspicuous chair in a corner of the transept beside an elaborately carved confessional. An old woman knelt near him on a flimsy stool, her back curved like a bow, and sobbed out a prayer. He saw tears coursing down her withered, bony cheeks; and, watching her, Elbert Wing suddenly understood. She was to him, at that moment, a symbol of the suffering that was surely to come upon Esperanza. She was old, very old. Others younger and less perceptive might scorn her grief and fears, but the passing of years had granted her an elemental wisdom. The glamor of battle, the exultant almost vainglorious spirit that filled young men's hearts all about her touched her not at all. She foresaw only blood and fire and misery; so much was written in her eyes. Wing averted his gaze from her, somehow sick at heart.

As he tiptoed away toward the Cathedral doors the organ burst forth in a tremendous hymn that soared to the limitless dusk-laden heights of the groined nave, thundered down triumphantly upon the kneeling congregation. He passed through the doors and out into the cool night, the while pondering gravely over the mystic omnipotence that

overspread the world, radiating from the glittering pomp of Rome. . . .

In the dark stillness of the Plaza two men, conversing in low tones upon a park bench, attracted his attention; there reached his ears the unusual, almost startling sound of his mother tongue being spoken. He glanced at them, curiously, as he passed. One of them, the younger of the two, he instantly recognized as Don José's American chauffeur; the other—he halted abruptly in the welcome shadow of a tamarind, his heart beating a triphammer song, an expression of utter amazement upon his mild, good-natured face.

A moment later he turned and, with an effort at outward unconcern, walked back past the bench. He glanced again, cautiously, at the men. Just as he passed the elder of them struck a match, cupped his hand about it, and lighted a cigarette. His profile was for a brief instant clearly visible in the burst of yellow flame.

"Erik Tegel," said Elbert Wing to himself. "Good God!"

He hurried on, incredulous and shaken.

Seeming suddenly to reach a decision, he glided into the darkness beneath the trees, circled to a spot some ten yards behind the bench where the two men were seated—and waited. Through his mind there swept a hurried yet vivid recollection of a certain snow-covered street in Eastern Europe; churches with gilded domes that glittered in a

crisply blue sky; a sleigh, with a young man and an old man seated in it, driving past a howling, frenzied mob.

Perhaps he waited there an hour—two hours. Time was of no significance to him that night. He felt that he was on the eve of some tremendous, astonishing discovery.

At last the two men rose from the bench and walked briskly across the Plaza. They crossed the Calle Marco, whose shops were shuttered and deserted, and turned down a narrow, unlit alleyway. Elbert Wing, at a safe distance, started to follow them.

CHAPTER IV

I

BIANCA seemed, these days, to be growing younger hourly. Happiness had colored her beauty to a new radiance; had endowed her with a certain lightness of spirit not evident before.

Everett's sentiment toward her was complex and wholly indefinable; a mixture of objective admiration and heady emotions. He was one of those beings who had within him, unknowingly, all the artist's susceptibility to beauty, but not the artist's creative outlet for that susceptibility. Whether he actually loved Bianca he did not ask himself—not because he hesitated to do so, but because it never for an instant occurred to him that he was not gloriously in love with her.

Sometimes she was like an exquisite goddess, serene and remote above human foibles. And then again the sheer proximity of her, or perhaps a deliberately lingering glance of her poignant eyes would rouse within him the sudden white flame of youthful passion; during those moments, indeed, she was adorably human, and adorably a woman. . . .

She managed to hold his affections without the creation of artificial bonds, never permitting her love for him to become a cloying thing. She made no apparent attempt to hold him at her side, no demands upon his freedom. And he, inwardly conscious that his liberty was intact, was in manlike fashion selfishly pleased to seek her of his own accord.

On the evening of the third Sunday in January they were sitting together in the slanting twilight shadows of the verandah. She, in one of her peculiarly quiet, industrious moods, was sewing; he smoking a cigarette, stirring restlessly now and then in his chair. He had not seen Don José for many days, nor Tegel, and an uncertainty concerning the pregnant future filled him with a vague uneasiness. This he strove to conceal, but she was quick to sense it. Presently she put down her sewing, crossed over to his chair and perched herself gently upon the arm of it with an effortless grace.

"Poor boy," she said, kissing his forehead lightly. "You're very restless; I can see that—" Her voice grew wistful. "I ought to have known that you couldn't be happy here with me forever—doing nothing."

"Nonsense." He tried to laugh, wishing inwardly that her perceptive powers were not so unutterably keen.

"Nonsense, you say. And yet, my dear Everett,

you seem to think that I don't realize that you will never—care for me, as I do for you. No—don't look angry! It is nothing to blame yourself about. You have been as good and sweet to me as you possibly could be, and for that alone I am happy——”

And then, just as lovers have done since the dawn of the world, he took her in his arms and tried to give her the assurances he felt due her.

Some minutes later they observed a servant boy hurrying from the Casa Azul through the shadowy dusk of the garden toward them. She went back to her chair; resumed her sewing.

The boy came up to Everett and bowed.

“Señor Tegel desires to see Señor Gail immediately at the Casa Azul.”

He bowed once again and departed. Everett turned to Bianca.

“You see,” he said soberly. “They’ve sent for me. It must mean that—something’s going to happen.”

She seemed, of a sudden, to have lost the color in the gentle curve of her cheek; she was, at the moment, almost ethereal. When she answered it was in her native tongue, her voice but a whisper. For an instant her arm clung to his in a fierce little embrace.

“*Vaya con Dios,*” she said, a tremendous light shining in her eyes. “The moment has come at last——” her lips quivered, but she fought herself

bravely to an unflinching calm. "Oh Everett, my dearest, this adventure of Don José's is a dangerous thing. Take care of thyself—come back to me. . . ."

II

Tegel was waiting for him, impatiently, at the door of the Casa Azul. They shook hands gravely.

"Get your hat," Tegel said abruptly, the expression on his hard, colorless features inscrutable as ever, "—and also a pistol and holster. You will find one in the arms chest behind the stairs; here is the key. It is just as well to be armed these days; there may be trouble at any moment. See, too, that you wear the weapon concealed. —Now hurry, while I wait for you."

He found a 45-calibre automatic, cartridges and leather holster, in the arms chest as Tegel had indicated. He rejoined him upon the steps a moment later, and together they hurried out to the road, turned toward Santa Palma all crimson in the setting sun. The harbor was deserted, a blinding mirror of silver; not a breath of air stirred the drooping, dust-laden leaves of the mangos that lined the roadside.

"There is news," Tegel volunteered, quickening his pace. "We are on the eve of great events. The southern division of the *Valientes*, acting under orders, attacked the garrison at Los Barrios this

afternoon. They are fighting hard, but as our agents have cut the transinsular telegraph wires for our own protection we cannot get any news. Don José will tell us what has happened when he arrives in Santa Palma tonight—in disguise, of course.”

“Where are we to meet him?” Everett asked.

“That is all arranged. We have secret headquarters in an abandoned house just below the Morro. We must go there on foot—any other method would be too conspicuous.”

“And after that——?”

Tegel shook his head.

“In an affair like this individual plans are made from moment to moment. Don José is very anxious to restrain the Santa Palma *Valientes* from acting until the right moment arrives—that will be when Los Barrios has been captured and the southern division is marching northward. But it is hard to withstrain these lads; they are hot-headed, impulsive. Even this afternoon I had to break up their plans for a suicidal procession through the streets of Santa Palma——”

He broke off; relapsed into a thoughtful silence.

It was nearly dark when they reached the outskirts of the town. Ahead of them an old man carrying a pole was trudging through the narrow, cobblestoned streets, zigzagging from lamp-post to lamp-post, creating mellow bursts of yellow light in the gathering gloom. They made their way to

an unpretentious little fonda on the Calle Marco and supped in silence.

At nine o'clock they were seated on a bench in the Plaza Nacional. Through the foliage of the tamarinds the arc lights of the *Intendencia* shone in irregular bursts of silvery light, and there came to their ears the distant muffled music of the Cathedral organ, a rising and falling cadence of vibrating sound.

"Do you know," Everett remarked whimsically, "that you've never told me anything about yourself—Mr. Tegel? We're to be thrown together in our work. Don't you think you might divulge some of your past? —You're really a very mysterious kind of person."

Tegel flicked the ashes from his cigarette; laughed.

"What is it you want to know about me, my young friend?"

"Well—your nationality, for instance."

"I am a citizen of the world. I claim allegiance to no nation; and, conversely, I am not bound in honor to serve any flag, man, or group of men."

"How did you find your way into Don José's services, then?"

"A combination of circumstances which—frankly—I am not going to divulge. There is absolutely no use trying to—pump me. I am loyal to the cause that you are serving; that should be sufficient knowledge for you. —By the way, did you notice

that rather stout old man in a straw-colored suit who passed by us a moment ago? He seemed to be extremely interested in us."

"No," Everett said, with a trace of asperity. "I didn't notice him—and I think that you're a damned close-mouthed fellow, Tegel."

"It is every man's privilege, my dear Mr. Gail, to be close-mouthed, as you call it. Perhaps when you are a little older you will discover that the less a man tells about himself in this world the more he is respected. —Have another cigarette, won't you?"

III

For fully half an hour Tegel had led the way through an intricate maze of narrow, high-walled alleys, lightless and deserted, until at last they emerged from the town and found themselves upon a rock-bound neck of land that jutted seaward to the east of the harbor. In the uncertain, blue-gray light of a virginal moon that hung high in a cloudless sky Everett could discern, across the water, the outline of the western shore, and the squat, square bulk of the Casa Azul looming above an opaque mass of foliage near the seagirt end of the promontory.

Tegel ahead of him halted, his head alertly poised.

"I thought I heard someone following us," he muttered.

Everett peered back through the gloom toward

the jumbled mass of houses that marked the sudden end of the town. He saw nothing; heard nothing.

Tegel laughed, a shade nervously.

"I am imagining things. —Come. We must not be late for Don José."

They hurried onward, stumbling frequently upon fragments of rock that strewn the irregular path. Perhaps a quarter of a mile ahead of them Everett could see the gloomy pile of Morro Castle rising dimly against the lighter background of the night. Presently Tegel left the path and began to clamber down the steep, rocky slope toward the harbor.

They eventually reached the water's edge and he proceeded to lead the way along a curving stretch of beach. Rounding a jutting wall of rock, after five minutes' walking, they came quite suddenly upon a house, a dilapidated single-story structure of wood perched insecurely upon the slope some twenty feet above the placid waters of the harbor.

"This," Tegel explained as they mounted a flight of flimsy steps and stood outside the door, "used to be a fisherman's resort—and a meeting place for smugglers. There was a prohibitive tax upon the import of Jamaica rum in those days, and the smugglers carried on a profitable trade. . . . Pinar had the house closed some years ago, and now Don José finds it an ideal spot for a secret headquarters."

The door was presently opened from within, and they entered a large, bare room illy-lighted by

a single oil lamp that hung from the blackened rafters of a low ceiling. The atmosphere was redolent of stale tobacco. There were, scattered haphazard about the room, a number of straw-bottomed chairs battered and worn with age; six or seven primitive pine tables bearing tumblers stained with red wine, and overturned bottles. The floor, Everett noticed, was littered with cigarette stubs, burnt matches, and scraps of paper. The room had, generally, the appearance of having very recently been the meeting place of a considerable gathering of men.

He who had opened the door, a cringing, diminutive old man whose features were practically invisible in the dimness of the lamplight, bowed as they entered. Before sitting down Tegel called him aside and began to ply him with questions in hurried, whispered Spanish. The old man replied volubly, with an increasing excitement, indicating the empty room with a sweeping, comprehensive gesture of his arm. Tegel, when he had heard what he had to say, became livid with anger; the old man's voice rose to a shrill terrified treble. "Señor . . . it was no fault of mine . . . how could I, an old man, restrain them. . . ." At last Tegel, in a fit of apparent exasperation, pushed him out of the door; slammed it to; and rejoined Everett.

"A pretty mess!" he cried, throwing his hat upon the table and flinging his lanky frame into a

chair. "Two hours ago the commanders of the various Santa Palma sections of the *Valientes*—twenty-one in all—were due here to make their reports, so that Don José on his return might be assured that all was in readiness. Nineteen of the leaders appeared, this old agent tells me. The other two, Alonzo Murias of the Marina district and Pablo Meller of Santo Cerro, became impatient with the delay, it seems, and started off with their men to Los Barrios to join the fighting there. They went without orders——"

He shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"They are young fools and will pay dearly for the experience, for it is clear to me that we can only stand against the Federalists if we act unitedly. —However, a handful of men like that will not seriously affect our plans, one way or another——"

He ceased to speak, staring intently at the door as a tenuous shaft of moonlight filtered into the room, stole across the walls. The door creaked upon its hinges; was stealthily opened. The figure of a man appeared—a peasant in rough corduroys and clumsy hobnailed boots, a heavy leather belt about his waist. A wide-brimmed sombrero of black felt effectively shadowed his features from the rays of the solitary lamp overhead. He closed the door behind him, and approached Tegel with an easy, confident stride. Everett, with a queer little thrill tingling through his veins, saw that the newcomer was Don José. His features were grimy

and travel-stained, his clothes covered with a fine powder of white dust.

"Alonzo Murias and Pablo Meller have set out for Los Barrios with their men, disregarding orders," Tegel announced gravely.

Don José sat down and lighted a cigarette.

"I know that already," he said, extinguishing the match. "An agent outside Santa Palma informed me."

He paused, surveying his cigarette thoughtfully.

"In every large organization there are, of a necessity, certain weak individuals. It is far better that these should be discovered before they harm anyone but their foolish selves. Already the Federalists have detected their departure, and have sent cavalry in pursuit. In their enthusiasm these fellows made too much noise. They will, without a doubt, be captured before morning."

"Can't anything be done to warn them?" Everett asked.

"Why?" parried Don José calmly. "They acted without instructions. Let their blood be upon their own heads. I, myself, have no further use for such as they."

He drew his chair closer.

"I was on the *Camino Real* all day. The news, so far, is good. Our *Valientes* under the command of Jésu Natchez—God bless him for his brave heart—attacked Los Barrios simultaneously from all sides at four o'clock. By six, when we cut the

telegraph wires, we were in possession of practically the whole town, and the garrison was about to surrender. We had lost seventeen men, but the Federalists had lost many more."

Then Tegel asked hurriedly:

"And the Werner-Borzdorfs—did you hear if they were a success?"

"Magnificent," Don José told him, "—and a total surprise to the enemy. I think it will be through those little weapons that we will gain our final victory. The report of my spies, you will remember, stated that the Federalists had but eight machine guns in the whole island, and those were the most antiquated type of Maxims."

Into the mind of Everett, who was listening attentively, there crept a curious, uneasy suspicion. Almost unconsciously he allowed himself to voice aloud his thoughts.

"Werner-Borzdorfs?" he repeated. "That must be a new make of machine gun. Where——"

With an altogether astonishing vehemence Tegel snapped at him: "Please don't interrupt. We are too busy to answer idle questions." And at the same time directed a covertly frowning glance at Don José, that Everett felt instinctively was in the nature of a warning. Don José, intercepting it, changed the conversation with a clumsy abruptness that was oddly at variance with his usual imperturbability.

"Tomorrow morning at seven," he said to Tegel,

"you will give the arranged signal for the Santa Palma attack. Is your machine ready?"

Tegel contented himself with a nod. His usually pallid cheeks suffused to a deep red betrayed the suppressed anger within him. Don José spoke hurriedly to Everett.

"I asked Tegel to bring you here tonight because I have something important to tell you. I have found a way in which you may, perhaps, make yourself of great use to our cause. Sometime ago, in a conversation with me about your past life, did you not mention that you had been in the Radio Service of the United States Navy during the War?"

"I did," Everett said, inwardly marvelling at the man's memory for infinite details.

"Good. I thought so. Now, down at Rivadavia, the western seaport, there is a gunboat which we intend to capture. She will be of a certain use in patrolling the coast. She is fitted with wireless telegraphy, and we will need you to operate it; your knowledge of Spanish is now good enough for the purpose."

Tegel started to interrupt, but Don José silenced him with a gesture of his hand.

"—And now, I think, Mr. Gail, you had better get some sleep, so that you will be ready for the tasks of tomorrow. Tegel and I still have many details to discuss which will be of little interest to you; so if you will go into that back room, behind

the door over there, you will find a bed which may not prove too uncomfortable for you."

Realizing that these two wished to be left alone and that he was being politely but firmly dismissed, he followed the direction Don José had indicated and discovered a small, unlighted chamber at the rear of the house. The narrow cot with its horse-hair mattress which he found there was none too yielding to his body, but he was sufficiently weary to be able, soon, to fall asleep.

IV

Tegel helped himself to a glass of wine and, leaning across the table, spoke in Spanish with a certain evident bitterness.

"That boy—why do you insist upon letting him put his finger in our affairs? He may not even be trustworthy, and his services are hardly worth the risk they involve. Personally, I find him an unbelievable nuisance with his damned, inquisitive little Yankee mind."

Don José sighed wearily.

"You think I owe you an explanation? *Bueno*—I shall give it to you. In the first place, you will recollect that Corcovado had a long tongue. *Dios!* how he used to chatter! Now—I have no way of knowing just how much he told this boy. They were together much of the time when I was visiting my agents. It was only after his death that I

realized he might have talked too much to the American. Supposing—" he leaned forward, tapping upon the surface of the table to emphasize his words, "supposing this young Gail has heard—about *the actual source of supplies?* Because it is possible that he may know of such things I am bound to keep an eye upon him until we have attained success. But wholly apart from all that, I like the lad. He is energetic, and quick to help whenever he can. This revolution is a grand adventure for him; it is in the way of an innovation—and to an *Americano* innovation is the spice of life."

"We are not here to amuse striplings," Tegel said harshly.

Don José permitted himself an indulgent smile.

"I am afraid you take some things too seriously, Tegel. The lad can do no harm, possibly a great deal of good. The *Intrepido* lying in Rivadavia harbor, which is the whole of the Esperanza navy,"—his lips curled contemptuously—"will presently fall into our hands. I have a crew ready for her, since I think it will be wise to patrol the coast in order to prevent possible outside assistance to the Federalists in the way of foreign supplies. Although this crew is now assembled, waiting for orders, I have been unable to find amongst my followers a single man with any knowledge of the wireless telegraph. —That is where Gail will be invaluable."

"And you would trust him?" Tegel was hotly incredulous. "Don't forget that if any interference comes it will be from his cursed country, and no other."

Don José pondered before replying.

"I think that is an impossibility. Those in power at Washington scarcely realize the existence of Esperanza. Moreover, there has been no one to inform them concerning our national affairs since they abolished their consulate here when foreign trade collapsed some fifteen years ago. As for the boy, if he does know—certain things, he is too ingenuous to cause trouble; he is wrapped up in the pleasure of his own experiences, one might say."

A sneer twisted Tegel's lips.

"He has, perhaps, other more subtle interests in Esperanza than the Revolution. There is Señora Valdez, for instance——"

Don José sprang to his feet, fists clenched, the blood surging darkly to his face. He looked at Tegel, for a fleeting instant, as if he would like to kill him.

"As long as you live never mention such a thing again." His eyes presently lost their hardness; anger subsided. "Señora Bianca was treated illy by a harsh world, but it is not the part of a *caballero* to discuss her fair name."

A flush of shame crept into Tegel's cheeks at the reprimand; he toyed nervously with his wine glass,

eyes cast to the ground. Don José turned gently to the discussion of other matters.

"And now, concerning these ammunition manifests I have here a letter from Walbeck, head of the syndicate. . . ."

V

Outside, the pallid moon travelling higher in the sky cast quivering light upon the dilapidated walls of the house. Inland from Santa Palma came the booming of cathedral bells announcing the hour of two, the mellow sound rolling with infinite slowness over the waters of the harbor, reverberating against the rock-strewn sheerness of the cliffs. A figure, crouching at one of the closely shuttered windows of the house, listening intently to the hum of voices from within, shifted its position and sought the sanctuary of deeper shadows as the moonbeams crept nearer along the wall.

An hour passed. The solitary light that gleamed through the shutter cracks was suddenly extinguished; the drowsy hum of voices ceased.

Elbert Wing straightened up from his crouching position; stretched his weary limbs, and stole away swiftly in the direction of Santa Palma. In the exultation of the discovery which he had made he felt like crying aloud.

CHAPTER V

I

A SPASMODIC, distant crackling of rifles, borne lazily into the bedroom upon the breeze that floated through the tiny window, penetrated the mind of Elbert Wing and dispelled a maze of evanescent dreams. He tumbled hurriedly out of bed, his faded blue eyes alight—for the first time since many a month—with the shining eagerness of one who has worthy deeds to accomplish. The ponderous deliberation of advancing years seemed to have deserted him; his movements, as he dressed impatiently, were those of a young and alert man.

He had scarcely completed his dressing, and the meticulous brushing of the dozen silvery hairs that remained upon his shining head, when he became sharply aware of a faint vibration in the atmosphere, a curiously insistent humming that increased in volume as he listened, filled the very room with its throbbing crescendo. He hurried to the window. Santa Palma lay before him, a dormant, blazing mass of color in the early morning sunshine. High above the flat tiled roofs of the upper town he discerned a white-winged thing that

wheeled and circled leisurely in the sky. There was, he thought, a certain insolent superiority about its unhampered progress, away up there beyond the reach of crawling, earth-bound humanity. He caught, presently, a glimpse of its propeller flashing a metallic silvery cascade as it veered toward the sun's face.

Something dropped from the aeroplane, spread through the sky in a cone-shaped shower formed of a myriad tiny particles. The specks grew larger as he watched, drifted in all directions on the wings of the morning breeze; he saw that they were pieces of paper—leaflets, a vivid green in color. A dozen of them descended in an aimless, zigzagging flutter past his window; eventually alighted upon the asphalt surface of the Plaza below. People—a rapidly increasing throng of men, women and children—were hurrying from their houses to gape open-mouthed at the droning thing in the sky above them.

A man ran to pick up one of the colored slips of paper, and was instantly surrounded by a clamoring, eager mob. The sound of voices, shrill but indistinct, came drifting up to Wing's ears. He distinguished one word, "*Valientes*" uttered again and again.

The aeroplane, by now some six thousand feet above the town, turned suddenly southward, crossed over the fringe of ceiba trees that topped the heights of Santo Cerro, and faded away in the blueness of

the sky. The droning note of its engine hung listlessly in the morning air for a while, grew gradually fainter, and died away.

Wing hurried downstairs, and in the Bodega found Tomas de Ruy, his landlord, perusing one of the green leaflets with a puzzled frown. The little Esperanzan appeared grave—graver than Wing had ever remembered seeing him.

He greeted Wing with a perfunctory *buenos dias* and handed him the paper.

"Read that, Señor," he said. "You will find it interesting."

Wing read the leaflet slowly, and with considerable difficulty. The wording was in Spanish, badly printed, the ink smeared as if still wet from the printing press.

CITIZENS OF SANTA PALMA!

I, Don José Rodriguez, Citizen and Planter of Santa Palma, direct descendant of our country's most illustrious family, have viewed with ever-growing concern the burdens thrust upon our fair republic by an incompetent and unscrupulous government that will not relinquish its power until forced out by passage of arms. Unable to bear any longer the intolerable sins of taxation, corruption and indifference to public welfare perpetrated by these men, I have decided to come to your rescue. Your cause shall be my cause. My valiant followers, of whom there are over twenty thousand pledged unto death, have sworn to support me in a glorious cam-

paign against the existing tyranny and oppression— (Here followed a long list of specific grievances against the Pinar government; unjustifiable taxes; militaristic despotism; neglect of the national industries of coffee, tobacco and sugar; failure to provide roads, lighting, sewerage, etc.) The climax to our misfortunes came when a loyal and good citizen was foully murdered in the Teatro Municipal by a uniformed officer simply because he exercised his inherent right of free speech and ventured to criticize the shortcomings of our present administration.

Citizens! Friends! Patriots! I call upon you all. With God's aid we will win this battle. We will emerge triumphant to see Esperanza a greater, nobler and more prosperous nation than she has ever been in all her history. To this I have pledged heart, soul, and body, and twenty thousand others with me.

JOSE RODRIGUEZ

President of the Liberationists of Esperanza.

"Well," said Wing, "—and how do you feel about this? You're a typical citizen."

The little man replied:

"I am a man of business, Señor. Such an affair will temporarily ruin my trade, yet I believe we will all benefit in the end. This Rodriguez, you know, is a *caballero*. By his suave speech he has managed to fire the imaginations of a great many young men—not as many as he says, perhaps, but still a considerable number. My younger son

Oton, for instance—he left here with a company of *Valientes* for Los Barrios last night. It is for the young men to constitute themselves the saviors of their country; we old and feeble ones can only watch—and pray.”

II

Within an hour Federalist troops came pouring into the streets to take up patrol duty. De Ruy, in a spirit of caution, drew down the heavy iron shutters of the Bodega; other establishments about the Plaza did likewise. The majority of the inhabitants clung to the shelter of their houses, peering now and then, awe-struck, from their jalousied windows. The morning sun blazed down upon streets that were deserted but for groups of soldiers in red and green uniforms who stood, heavily armed, at every corner, the while exchanging badinage as if the whole affair was to be but some short-lived farce. Don José's power had not yet been demonstrated. The aeroplane, indeed, caused a certain amount of excitement, but was generally regarded as the clever advertisement of a mountebank seeking notoriety.

The morning passed without disturbance. And then, suddenly, at noon three hooded military wagons came rattling down the hillside into the Plaza; they drew up before the *Intendencia*. Jalousies cluttered open, and a hundred curious heads

peered down into the Plaza. Elbert Wing, gazing out of his bedroom window, saw the drivers descend from their insecure seats, and a mass of soldiers crowding about the wagons. He leaned forward, startled, as a narrow, inanimate burden shrouded in sackcloth was lifted from beneath the hood of the first wagon; another followed; and yet another. . . . At that moment he saw, too, De Ruy, short-legged and awkward, hurrying ludicrously across the Plaza toward the wagons; saw him merge into the blurred mass of red and green uniforms.

Five minutes later De Ruy returned, with odd mechanical steps, along the path beneath the tamarind trees. He disappeared beneath the arcade. Downstairs the glass door of the Bodega was slammed to with a tinkling crash; and there reached Wing, at the same moment, the heartrending sound of a man sobbing.

Across the Plaza the last of the twenty-nine bodies was being carried by soldiers into the *Intendencia*. The drivers clambered up to their perches, cracked their whips, and the trio of wagons rattled away.

And so war came to Santa Palma.

III

The sun, with a seemingly wilful malignity, had the appearance of pausing inert in the molten sky

before dropping beneath the horizon. It shone obliquely, with an unendurable heat upon a sea that was like some sheet of hammered gold.

Elbert Wing, coatless and saturated, shifted his seat in the stern of the motorboat so that his broad back was turned to the burning west. In his new position he could see astern, to the south, where the coastline of Santa Palma was still faintly visible, a misty, purple streak upon the colorless horizon.

A lean native, untidily clad in oil-smeared drill trousers and a cotton singlet, bent over the throbbing motor; tightened a bolt with a rusty wrench. His pit-marked, yellow face was placid, expressionless.

Wing took out his watch and regarded it with a show of impatience.

"I thought you could do better than this," he complained in Spanish, glancing astern at the lingering coastline.

"The Señor knows the speed of my boat," the native answered in a monotonous voice. "I have already told him that she will make no greater speed, and no less. The Señor will be at his destination an hour after midnight. So much have I assured him, and I am a man of my word."

Wing nodded, temporarily appeased. He stooped over, and from the battered suitcase lying at his feet extracted a paper-covered notebook and pencil. He commenced to write in a minute, concise hand

—at first slowly; then with increasing speed, until his pencil was travelling to and fro across the paper with a kind of machine-like regularity.

The boatman left his engine, shuffled forward and negligently grasped the wheel of his craft. He spat over the gunwale. Once only did he glance back at his passenger, who was writing now with feverish speed.

"*Loco*," he muttered, and shrugged his shoulders. Still, if the mad foreigner chose to pay the price, he, Felipe Urbano, was not the man to refuse good money. He speculated lazily as to why the *Americano* was so anxious to get to the islands in the North; one place, he considered, personally, was as good as another. . . . Presently, finding the problem beyond his limited capacities of reasoning, he gave it up; resigned himself to a complacent survey of the water ahead of him—this, at least, required only an agreeable minimum of mental effort.

The sun slipped below the horizon. Night came on with startling swiftness. The darkening sky was of a sudden powdered with an infinity of stars. Wing put away his notebook and pencil, when from the south there came rolling over the water the faintest perceptible sound, as of far distant thunder, that died reluctantly upon the breathless evening air.

He glanced up hurriedly; jerked his thumb astern.

"Fools," he said, succinctly.

The *barquero* nodded as he cupped his hands to light a tiny cigar. For the first time during the voyage he was conscious of a glimmer of respect for his passenger.

CHAPTER VI

I

A TOWN, Don José was wont to remark, may betray its own soul as may a man. Rivadavia, on the western coast, had neither the fiery pride and patriotism of Santa Palma, the Esperanzan capital, nor the southern lethargy of Los Barrios. Favored with an extremely fertile soil in the surrounding districts Rivadavia was prosperous; it was also mercenary. Coffee plantations, emerald green, descended from the uplands to the very walls of the town; the concrete jetties of a neat yet inartistic harbor bespoke of civic progress rather than sentiment. The demolition of a five-hundred-year-old crumbling cathedral to make room for a stucco chamber of commerce betrayed, illuminatingly, that Rivadavia was material, that the timeworn traditions so beloved by most Esperanzans were unrespected by its alert inhabitants.

The Rivadavians received the news of the revolution's outbreak with more or less mingled feelings, in which suspicion predominated. True, they had suffered like other towns from the mulcting taxation

that went to fill the pockets of the Pinar clique, but they had suffered less than their neighbors. There were coffee growers in the Pinar administration so that, on the whole, Rivadavia was content to let well enough alone—to prosper, in other words, at the expense of the rest of the republic. Moreover, who could tell what this Rodriguez, a *caballero* of the old school, might do should he attain power? Rivadavia had a jealous contempt for all Santa Palmans, *caballeros* in particular; Rivadavia did not believe in noblesse; it believed in dollars.

Don José, it turned out, had barely five hundred sworn supporters in Rivadavia. On the morning of the third day of the revolution, hearing of the success of their fellow *Valientes*, the five hundred gathered en masse and sallied forth bravely enough to attack the Rivadavia *Intendencia* and the garrison. They were eager and courageous, but their numerical strength was insufficient to overcome the three hundred well-trained, well-equipped Federalist troops that opposed them. The garrison successfully withstood their clumsy attack, and the soldiers, swarming out into the streets with bayoneted rifles, drove the *Valientes* out of the town and up into the plantations of the hill district. By noon the victorious Federalists were able to return to town, having chased the rebels some ten kilometers inland where they lurked, a shattered, disorganized remnant of what they had been at daybreak.

At precisely one o'clock that afternoon His Honor

Mario Lopez y Barra, *Alcalde* of Rivadavia, who had witnessed the beginning of the pursuit from the eminent safety of the *Alcaldia's* top floor windows, received the Commandante of the Federalist troops in his private office and congratulated him.

"You will probably be awarded the Cross of Esperanza for this," he remarked graciously. "How many of these cursed rebels have been killed—all I hope?"

The Commandante stroked his superbly waxed mustache thoughtfully. He was a short, bellicose little man who was forced to assume a constant air of ferocity to compensate for his lack of stature. His field uniform of gray-green was adorned with a row of medals, his Sam Browne belt polished to a high lustre.

"They lost eighteen," he announced. "We suffered five casualties only. I do not think they will dare to enter the town again, but I have stationed outposts to watch for them. Tell me something. Who is this upstart Rodriguez under whose orders the rebels apparently acted?"

The *Alcalde* frowned heavily as he offered the officer a cigar.

"I used to know him of old in Santa Palma. A rather fine *caballero* in his way, and possessed of a brilliant mind. He is a direct descendant of the Rodriguez governors who ruled our country during the Spanish régime. And here a word of caution, Commandante. This man will not give up his

efforts easily; you may rest assured that the absurd little affair of this morning was but a preliminary. When he turns his personal attention to Rivadavia I am inclined to think that he will have other tricks up his sleeve. He is an infernal conjuror, who juggles with human lives."

The Commandante, puffing at his cigar, seemed unconvinced; he turned to leave with a vainglorious jingling of spurs and scabbard.

"My brave soldiers will defend the town," he proclaimed. "Have no fear, Excellency."

As he started to descend the steps of the *Alcaldia* a soldier, perspiring and dusty, dismounted from a bicycle and came running up to him. He saluted and handed the Commandante a yellow slip of paper.

"Commandante. This telegram was received at the garrison ten minutes ago."

The officer read the telegram.

Rivadavia will be attacked by a special Liberationist force at two o'clock. The signal for your surrender will be a white flag upon the garrison. Salutations.

RODRIGUEZ. *President of the Liberationists.*

"*Dios!*" cried the Commandante, and his face turned a brick red. "Surrender, indeed! The man must be a maniac."

Nevertheless, as he hurried toward the garrison he was conscious of a growing uneasiness. The

words of the Alcalde came back to him, unpleasantly: “. . . a conjuror who juggles with human lives.”

It was almost a quarter before two o'clock when he entered the garrison gates and stiffly acknowledged the rifle salute of the sentry on duty. In the barracks room he unburdened himself of his pent-up rage by roundly cursing an orderly who had failed, it appeared, to give the necessary polish to his field boots that morning. When the orderly had gone he perused the telegram again—and became suddenly paler. The message was headed from the Federal Post Office at Los Barrios; undeniable evidence that the town was completely in the hands of the rebel forces.

He tore up the telegram; glanced at his watch. It lacked but five minutes, now, of two.

Through the open windows of the barracks there became audible a distant, vibrating hum. The sound grew louder as he listened. A sergeant stumbled into the room from the sun-baked parade ground; saluted.

“Commandante. An aeroplane has been sighted above the town.”

The Commandante lighted a pale, thin cigar; tossed the match casually out of the window.

“So that is the plan of Rodriguez,” he remarked. “He thinks to intimidate us. This pretty farce must have cost him something.”

The sergeant was ill at ease; he glanced nervously

out of the window toward the droning speck that was now visible in the sky.

"Any orders, Commandante?"

"None. Are you frightened, miserable one?"

The sergeant wiped his sweating brow with the back of his hand. He strolled uncertainly over to the gun rack, unlocked it, and took out his rifle; he inspected the bolt. It was painfully obvious that he had not, under the circumstances, the remotest idea what to do.

The bells in the tower of the *Alcaldia* boomed two. Scarcely had the sound died away on the listless air, when came a shattering roar that shook the barracks to its very foundations. The Commandante leaned out of the window; gazed, incredulously, toward the town. A thin column of smoke was curling above the jumble of houses into the pallid blueness of the sky.

Came another roar, more intensified than the first; and then another. The barracks trembled; a window tinkled to a myriad fragments upon the floor. The air was momentarily darkened with an acrid cloud of smoke. Fountains of earth spouted wildly upward from the parade ground. Two hundred hysterical little men in red and green uniforms came swarming into the barracks room, wild-eyed, frenzied with fear.

"We demand that you surrender, Commandante," they clamored. "We are powerless to defend ourselves against an aerial attack."

The Commandante surveyed them with folded arms.

"Cowards, all of you. I will never surrender."

They crowded about him uttering hoarse, threatening cries. In their terror at the thing in the sky above them they had temporarily lost all fear of this one little man who had ruled their destinies in the past, who had hitherto held them in cringing subservience. He called them vainly to order; told them to line up outside the barracks that they might form a patrol to guard the streets of the town; but they paid no heed whatever to him. Then, in the realization that his power over them had vanished, a look of pitiful amazement came to his face.

"Did you hear my orders?" he raged impotently.

At that moment one of them, with crafty, sunken eyes, who was standing behind him, deliberately whipped out a revolver from its holster and fired. The bullet passed through the Commandante's back; he flung up his arms and fell, lolling grotesquely upon the barracks floor. The mob stood motionless for an awestruck moment, then stampeded out to the parade ground.

The Commandante, with infinite difficulty, raised himself upon one elbow. Through the open window he saw a white flag being hoisted, fluttering, to the masthead at the garrison gate.

Blood was trickling down the tunic of his uniform.

"Swine," he said, loudly; and died.

II

The inhabitants of Rivadavia, Don José realized, knew indeed upon which side their bread was buttered. When his motor, with the azure Liberationist flag flying at the radiator, trundled into the town at sunset they lined the streets, sleek and suave and smiling, as if it had never entered their heads to offer any resistance to his cause. Don José himself, white-flannelled, the inevitable flower at his lapel, acknowledged their perfunctory cheers with sober inclinations of his head. About his mobile lips there played the glimmer of an ironical smile. He knew these people for what they were worth. If it hadn't been for Tegel and his aeroplane, well—things might have been different.

He directed Everett, who was at the wheel, to drive to the garrison. The motor slid on, noiselessly, between two lines of fawning, gaping humanity.

At the garrison a delegation of soldiers, headed by a dishevelled lieutenant, met him. They conducted him to the barracks, crowding eagerly about him, a sweating, evil-smelling horde, and showed him the pitiful remains of the Commandante lying upon a cot, uncovered.

"He resisted our will," the spokesman of the soldiers explained. "We knew that you, Don José, were our savior. But he, thick-headed mule, refused to give the order to surrender—so that we had to take matters in our own hands."

Then Don José, to their amazement, bowed his head and knelt for a moment before the pathetic, bloodstained figure. As he rose and turned to face the soldiers there was, for the briefest instant, undiluted hatred for them written on his face—but it passed swiftly, supplanted by his habitual mask of equanimity. He did not, however, hold further conversation with them.

As the car purred away from the garrison and turned toward the harbor he leaned forward and spoke to Everett. His voice was bitter.

"The Commandante," he said, "enemy or not, was a man one can admire. He did his duty, yet those wretched cowards murdered him. By the Holy God, I loathe scum like that!"

At the moment Everett sensed something of the man's innate virtue.

III

The gunboat *Intrepido* which formed the entire naval force of Esperanza was the chief booty of the Liberationists on the capture of Rivadavia. The crew surrendered with a sullen reluctance, and were replaced within twenty-four hours by a motley gathering of men scraped together by Don José's agents. The new crew was composed, principally, of young *Valientes* who had previously spent their three years of compulsory service in the naval school—an alternative from the army offered by the government to satisfy the fishing folk of the northern

coast. These young men, to whom were added several negroes to serve as stokers, were captained by one Sebastien Mores, a veteran of the Spanish Navy in the days when Esperanza had been a colony. Lured by promises of high pay, and a certain love of notoriety, Mores had been persuaded by Don José to leave temporarily the comfortable home he had established in Santa Palma, and to take command of the gunboat upon its capture. Don José saw that he was properly uniformed, gave him the empty title of Admiral of the Fleet, and rechristened the vessel the *Presidente Rodriguez*—one of those inexplicable little acts of childish vanity that caused Everett to laugh when he heard of it and wonder how a man possessing undeniable signs of greatness could descend to such trivialities; the Esperanzan character remained, as ever, a constant enigma to him.

It was Don José's desire that the gunboat should patrol the coast of the island until the revolution was successfully completed. There was still some trouble at Santa Palma; the *Valientes* were being stubbornly held up at the outskirts, unable to penetrate the town itself; they were waiting for reinforcements from Rivadavia and Los Barrios. Meanwhile, he told Mores in an interview at Rivadavia, he dreaded interference from outside shipping—a possible source of supply for the Federalists. All foreign vessels, he ordered, were to be held up by the gunboat and searched if they came within the three-mile limit of the republic.

"The crew is satisfactory enough," Mores remarked, after making his report to Don José on the last night before sailing, "and the vessel is in fairly good order. There is a wireless apparatus on board, too, which might prove useful to question suspicious craft—if I but had a man who knew how to operate it."

"I have your man," Don José assured him. "He will be aboard when you are ready to sail. He is a young American by the name of Gail. He will operate the radio for a week or two, meanwhile finding time to instruct young Luis Fernandez, the Los Barrios telegrapher, whom I am also sending aboard. Gail's Spanish is mediocre, but you will find him a willing assistant."

Sebastien Mores, who was of a less suspicious turn of mind than most of his associates, agreed to this plan cheerfully.

The *Presidente Rodriguez* put out to sea in the hazy red light of a lingering sunset the following afternoon—the sixth day of the revolution, and three days after the capture of Rivadavia. She headed southward, bound for Los Barrios, her blunt prow cutting leisurely through the limpid water, her single throbbing propeller tracing a frothy wake at her stern. The wheezing, clanking engines amidships churned out a bare nine knots, and in her painful progress the very plates of her hull groaned despairingly, as if threatening to disintegrate at any moment. Almirante Mores, resplendent in a white

and gold uniform, paced the canvas-covered bridge as she swung into the gathering dusk.

Everett, standing astern, watched the emerald sweep of the coastline until it had dissolved in misty purple obscurity; then turned and walked forward to the wireless cabin. He thrust open the door and paused for a moment on the threshold, surveying the apparatus disdainfully. It was a two-kilowatt affair of an ancient pattern with a range, he surmised, of perhaps a hundred miles by day and three hundred by night. He sat down, made a perfunctory examination of the generator, adjusted the rheostats, and put the receiver to his ears. A faint, indistinct buzzing informed him that FKQ was calling BZQ, but failing to be interested in what Martinique had to say to Kingston, Jamaica, he lighted a cigarette and ignored the prolonged, distant stuttering. Life in the Esperanza Navy, he concluded, might prove to be pretty dull, after all. He prepared reluctantly for his vigil.

At six bells a timid knock upon the door announced the arrival of his pupil. Fernandez, a slim brown-skinned boy, proved unexpectedly intelligent as he set to work to teach him the International Code. Night came on, presently, and Everett lighted the solitary oil lamp in a niche above the porthole while his pupil pored over a chart of dots and dashes.

It was after eleven when he decided to turn in. The fo'castle cubby-hole which had been allotted to him he found indescribably filthy and damp; he pro-

cured a mattress, instead, and dragged it to a clear space upon the foredeck. Lying down, and gazing through half-closed eyes at the illimitable starlit vault of the heavens, something of the serene peacefulness of the moment gradually pervaded his being, wafted him into a dreamless slumber.

IV

He awoke to find the gunboat riding at anchor in a palmetto-fringed inlet, torrid in the morning heat. Inland he could see a range of blue hills rising sheerly into the vivid sky beyond the tobacco plantations that sloped down to the shore. No signs of humanity were visible, save a primitive thatched drying house that had fallen into crumbling decay. Above him, on the flying bridge, he heard voices—Mores engaged in earnest conversation with a heavily-bearded peasant who had climbed aboard from a dory that was bumping disconsolately against the gunboat's hull.

After a few minutes the peasant left; rowed away in his clumsy craft toward the shore. Mores leaned over the bridge rail and called to Everett.

"You can breakfast with me," he said. "There are some things I must discuss with you."

Everett followed him to a diminutive cabin beneath the bridge, where coffee and bread were awaiting upon a table.

"That man," Mores said, as they sat down, "is

one of Don José's agents; he has brought some interesting news. Los Barrios, as well as Rivadavia, is now completely in our hands, and also the eastern province of Manzanillo. It is Don José's plan to reinforce the Santa Palma attack with combined troops from these three divisions—because Santa Palma is giving more trouble than he had anticipated; the *Valientes* are still held up at the Vega Real outside the town.

"The Los Barrios and Manzanillo divisions are on their way—so far, so good. But the Federalists made one exceedingly clever stroke before they surrendered Rivadavia. Their military engineers, it seems, have mined the railroad between Rivadavia and Santa Palma, so that we cannot use it to transport our troops. That will delay the reinforcements for at least a day while they march to Santa Palma instead of going by train as had been planned."

Everett asked how the *Valientes* had become aware of the existence of the mine.

"Spies, of course. Even now we are not certain of its precise location; it is concealed, and only a train will detonate it. We do know, however, that it was planned to place the mine near the San Jacinto tunnel—probably in the tunnel itself, which is on the side of a mountain some fifteen kilometers inland from Rivadavia. A dastardly act, but an infernally clever one when you come to think of it."

"And how will this news affect us here on the ship?" Everett asked anxiously.

"Not at all—except that after calling at Los Barrios we may be eventually ordered to Santa Palma, so that we may guard the northern coast until the capital is in Don José's hands. Meanwhile I must warn you to be constantly at the radio, and to inform me as soon as you are in communication with any vessels approaching Esperanza. Don José is especially anxious to prevent foreign craft from coming into our ports during the revolution."

Everett had, during this conversation, attempted to size up the man. He was honest, simple-hearted, a guileless servant who wished to obey Don José's every order without question. If he could only make a friend of Mores, it occurred to him, he might solve some of the mysteries that had of late been puzzling him. He decided upon a tentative remark.

"It seems to me," he said, putting down his coffee cup, "that Don José is needlessly afraid of foreign interference. This revolution is purely a national affair and there can be no possible reason for foreigners to mix themselves in it."

Mores was visibly taken aback; it was evident that he regarded this questioning of the Rodriguez policy as almost sacrilegious.

"Your suggestions are unnecessary," he observed acidly. "It is the part of a faithful soldier to obey unquestioning."

But Everett continued, nevertheless, to muse aloud as he sipped his coffee.

"I'm not criticizing, Almirante," he said, noticing

that his use of the title somewhat appeased the man's ruffled temper. "I'm merely expressing an opinion that would occur to anyone who used his mind—" His voice became grave as he leaned across the table. "There is something back of all this which Don José has never explained to his followers; I don't know what it is, but it exists—as sure as I'm sitting here. Where, for instance, did all the money come from to pay for the rifles, the machine guns—Tegel's æroplane? And who the devil is Tegel, anyway? He's not an Esperanzan."

Mores rose to leave the table.

"I don't know," he said shortly; "this is no time for suspicion"; then pausing at the door, added impulsively: "—but to tell you the truth, these things have also puzzled me not a little."

CHAPTER VII

I

THE first saffron streaks that presaged dawn, staining the waters of Guantanamo Bay, picked up from the depths of the gloom the tremendous bulk of the United States flagship *Columbia*. A feeble shaft of daylight penetrated the port of a cabin abaft the forward gun turrets. Within the cabin a tall, gray-bearded man in naval uniform was talking; his voice low, his expression calm but serious.

"What you have just laid before me," the Admiral said, rising to terminate the interview, "is of the greatest significance—" He paused, glancing once more at the litter of closely-written sheets lying upon the desk before him. "Your signed statement, the result of what you have seen and heard, lends undeniable strength to the matter; but, apart from that, Wing, knowing you as I have done since those days at Port Arthur and Vladivostok, I have implicit confidence in you. You can rest assured that the whole affair will be put into Washington's hands by radio—code of course—within the next few hours. And now perhaps you'll come and have some breakfast.

You look tired; the trip in that small motorboat couldn't have been much of a joke——"

"It was tiring," Wing agreed, "but we made good time. We only left Santa Palma yesterday at noon—about two hundred and eighty odd miles in seventeen hours. I had to pay the *barquero* a hell of a price, though, to take me. He was scared of possible storms, but I'm pretty familiar now with the tricks of the Caribbean barometer; I knew we'd get here all right. I'm sorry I can't stay now, Admiral. I've got to hurry on to Santiago; there's a Pan-American liner leaving for New York at seven this evening."

"I suppose," the Admiral suggested hurriedly, "that you'll use your discretion as to what you reveal to the Press—that is, until Washington has decided upon what action is to be taken. We don't want to embarrass the government——"

"By the time I reach New York," Wing replied, "you'll be down at Santa Palma, master of the whole situation—unless Washington fails to act."

"That would be unthinkable. Well. It would be absurd to try and thank you, Wing, for a tremendous service like this."

Wing said sharply:

"I took the only natural course. I'm hoping, too, that this little scoop will make them sit up in Park Row. Life in the old dog yet, they'll say—huh?"

He chuckled throatily, and extended his hand.

"By the way," said the Admiral. "How about

this harbor at Santa Palma? None of our ships have ever touched there."

Wing nodded toward the papers that littered the desk.

"You'll find details there—I had thought of that. There's scarcely fifty feet of water on Santa Palma bar at high tide. Rivadavia's the place for you—open roadstead, good anchorage, clean landing space with stone jetties. Also the railroad to Santa Palma begins right there at the docks."

He nodded again, shook hands, and left the cabin. As he clambered down the jacob's ladder to the waiting motorboat the sun crept above the horizon, changing the violet waters to a mellow, translucent gold. The coastline of Cuba appeared, faint and shrouded in a veil of early morning mist, and the long, dark shapes of a dozen battleships riding at anchor upon the placid bay.

Amidships upon the *Columbia*, as the motorboat chugged clear of her in a sweeping arc, the crackle of a high-powered radio sharply broke the dawn's stillness.

CHAPTER VIII

I

AN ebony night that closed in relentlessly upon an oily, smooth sea. An indecisive barometer, and stifling heat. Through a world of blackness the gunboat *Presidente Rodriguez* glided, her prow pointed toward Santa Palma thirty knots away.

At ten o'clock Everett stumbled wearily aft along the narrow, greasy deck, past a row of dilapidated lifeboats, and entered the wireless cabin. He lighted the oil lamp; sat down at the keys, an expression of disgust upon his tired face. The six monotonous days he had passed upon the gunboat lingered as a heavy, palling memory in his mind. He could not sleep, and he had taken the night watch from his pupil—partly from motives of kindness, partly because he craved even this distraction from the monotony of the long, black hours ahead of him.

Through the wide-open port of the cabin came only the sound of rippling waves against the ship's hull, and the lazy throb of the propeller astern. The night sky, seen through the port, was a wall of velvety blackness, unrelieved and—somehow—

ominous. He picked up the receiver and adjusted it upon his head. No sound tempered the impenetrable atmospheric stillness. He found himself suddenly wishing, fervently, that he might hear something—something to give him the assurance that other human beings were near; that the gunboat was not alone in an endless void of sea and sky and night. . . .

"I'm getting nerves," he thought, and laughed aloud. He sought the solace of a cigarette, inhaling it profoundly until his tensioned nerves were momentarily calmed. He began, presently, to speculate upon his chances of leaving the ship when she reached Santa Palma. He longed to be at the wheel of Don José's car once more, speeding along sunlit roads; to listen to Don José's caustic remarks, his amusing ironies and sarcasms. He wanted desperately, too, to see Bianca; to hear her gentle contralto voice, her face the while turned gravely, pleadingly up to his. He must see her; explain his absence. . . .

His thoughts were interrupted by a distant spasmodic buzzing in the receiver. He threw away his cigarette, and leaned forward, toying with the wave length indicator until the buzzing became more distinct—focused; finally resolved itself into a coherent sequence of dots and dashes.

USWB—he heard—*USWB de XXA*; an American fruit boat sending a formal acknowledgment for a weather report. He waited impatiently

until the message was completed, then swung the change-over switch that set the generator to life. The cabin hummed with the sound of it, rising to a plaintive crescendo wail; the semi-darkness was seared with jagged, intermittent flashes of violet light; the air became gradually pervaded with the sickening odor of artificial ozone.

He sent the attention signal; then called the fruit ship.

XXA—XXA—XXA—three times.

He switched off the motor and waited. The answer came after three minutes.

XXA. QRA? (What ship is that calling?)

Ignoring the question, he threw on the current again and tapped out:

Have you any news of the Esperanza revolution?

He was curious to know what version of the affair, if any, Don José had supplied to the outside world. He fretted through ten minutes until the reply came.

*Know nothing about Esperanza. Not in the code book Never heard of any revolution there—*QRT (Please don't interrupt—very insistently).

He laughed aloud, wishing humorously that Don José could have heard that frank answer; it was illuminating. Esperanza was, for once, definitely consigned to its proper degree of importance in the affairs of a busy universe.

Again he adjusted the wave length, and listened idly. He was able to distinguish the metallic blurr

of HIA (that was San Domingo) sputtering angry instructions to a Dutch-West Indian freighter that had stupidly lost its bearings. The whole world, he thought, was irritated, unnerved by the stifling imminence of the night.

His head nodded, after a while, and slipped forward upon his breast; he allowed himself to drift into a pleasant, vague state of oblivion that was penetrated now and then by the obscure throbbing of the engine amidships. . . .

How long he slept he did not know—perhaps ten minutes, perhaps an hour, or two. He was roused abruptly, to sit bolt upright in his chair, by a strange yet curiously familiar sound emanating from the receiver. He leaned forward, automatically focusing the wave length. He knew the sound—oh, so well, but could not for the moment place it in his mind. With a growing sense of surprise he lengthened the wave above 800, the shipping standard, still unable to classify the meaningless hum in his ears. . . . At last he had it, concise and definite—just above 950; and it dawned upon him in an access of acute realization that he was listening to a United States naval apparatus. Memories of the radio schools came flooding to his brain in an incoherent chaos. Tense with an inexplicable premonitory excitement he listened. The message, apparently from one ship to another, was in a naval code; he found himself reading detached phrases, here and there, with an almost startling ease.

. . . *We are 128 miles N. of Rivadavia . . . course south by south east half south.*

And then the other apparatus, farther away and irritatingly faint. An atmospheric disturbance momentarily obliterated its clarity. . . . *Marine detachment to seize railhead . . . orders . . . later . . . troops immediately via rail to Santa Palma.*

His mind was in a turbulent state; he listened intently, but heard no more; the night held its peace, guarding jealously its secrets. United States battle-ships approaching Rivadavia! Troops to Santa Palma. . . . What could it mean? It was appallingly clear to him that, for some reason unknown, the United States had decided to intervene in Esperanzan affairs. He felt suddenly and helplessly engulfed in a gigantic vortex of international politics—tremendous official secrets, of which he knew nothing. . . . His own pitiful little responsibilities assumed, at the same time, terrifying proportions. The shadow of vast, incomprehensible events obscured the immediate future.

He opened the cabin door, and a blast of furnace-like air assailed him as he hurried forward along the deck. He climbed the bridge ladder and, confronting Mores at the top, told him hurriedly what he had heard.

Mores was at first amazed, incredulous. He was forced to reiterate his words. An expression of growing concern came upon the Esperanzan's dark

countenance; he strolled over to the speaking tube, shouted a hasty command to the engine room; then turned to Everett.

"We will be at Santa Palma within a half hour's time. You will accompany me to the Casa Azul and repeat to Don José, who will be there, what you have just heard. Meanwhile I will give you a message to communicate to these *Americanos*, to find out the meaning of their intentions."

He eyed Everett, for an instant, darkly—as if holding him personally responsible for the deeds of his countrymen, and then entered the chart room. Through the window Everett saw him bending over a table, writing, his forehead corrugated by a worried frown. He came out several minutes later and handed him a slip of paper.

Everett hurried back to the wireless cabin; switched on the motor and sent out the U. S. Navy call:

The Admiral commanding the Esperanza Liberationist cruiser Presidente Rodriguez respectfully enquires the meaning of the presence of United States battle-ships in Esperanza waters.

SEBASTIEN MORES, *Almirante.*

He found himself smiling at the sleekly official phrasing of the message. Poor little Esperanza, so impotent, yet so vainglorious. . . .

The answer came sooner than he expected.

Barely ten minutes had passed when the naval apparatus boomed loud and insistent in his ears, seemingly threatened to shatter the delicate receiver. He took up a pencil; jotted down the words as they formed themselves, with staccato swiftness, in his brain:

The enquiry of the Admiral commanding the "Liberationist" vessel is hereby answered. Pending certain investigations by the United States government concerning the recent uprising in Esperanza United States Marine forces will occupy the principal seaports of the republic.

MACDONALD

Rear Admiral U. S. N.

The words rang mockingly in his ears, long after the vibrations had died away in the receiver. A nameless fear swept over him; he foresaw trouble, disaster, for all those concerned in Don José's spirited venture. The greatness of his own country seemed, of a sudden, an imminent, concrete fact.

He took the message up to Mores, who read it without comment and thrust it into his pocket. Almost at the same moment the lights of Santa Palma appeared, glimmering, off the port bow.

II

It was after midnight when Mores, accompanied by Everett, reached the summit of the long climb

to the Casa Azul. They had been careful to avoid Santa Palma, making their landing from the gunboat's pinnace at an obscure indenture of the coast near the harbor mouth. Violet lightning wavered in the sky as they neared the house. They entered without ceremony and Mores knocked at the library door.

Don José appeared; greeted them with quiet gravity, betrayed no surprise at their sudden appearance. He summoned Mores into the library, asking Everett politely to wait in the hall until he had need of him. The door closed. Everett stood at the threshold idly watching the intermittent flashes of lightning above the harbor that presaged an approaching storm.

Presently Mores emerged from the library, passed by him, hurrying out of the house. Everett started irresolutely, to follow him but was halted by a peremptory command from Don José who had come to the library door.

"Come in here, Gail," he said with an unwonted harshness. "I have a word to say to you, my young friend. You are not to return to the gunboat until I have questioned you upon certain matters."

Everett entered the library; sat down in a chair, slightly bewildered.

"This interference from the United States," Don José began, "puts everything in a new light. Indeed, it gravely threatens the success of my plans. Now, as to you— In case of—eh—some unpleas-

ant friction between the Liberationists and your own country, where would you stand?"

Everett was perplexed at the suddenness of the question.

"I—I hadn't thought of such a possibility," he admitted. "But,"—gathering more courage as he spoke—"if that was the case, I would certainly have to ask you to release me from any further obligation to serve you. You'd understand that, of course——"

Don José nodded impatiently. His voice remained calm, yet immeasurably bitter.

"Exactly. I had believed you would say that. But, unfortunately, such things are not so easily arranged." He became more visibly irate. "I must tell you that in my opinion your country has taken an intolerable and high-handed action. The vaunted love of you Americans for the freedom and liberty of small nations! What does it amount to, in the face of tonight's news? Bah—empty words!"

He snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"An American battleship is, by now, anchoring off Rivadavia; others will follow. They will land a detachment of marine soldiers sometime tomorrow morning, occupy the town and seize the railhead. Another detachment will be sent up to Santa Palma via the San Jacinto line——"

"There must be some very good reason——" Everett started to interpose; then stopped short, suddenly gripped by fear; his hands clenched the arms of his chair. Something, out of the past, with

stupendous, paralyzing clarity smote his brain. He stood up, unsteadily; found his voice with a supreme effort.

"I've just remembered—Mores told me the other day that the San Jacinto tunnel had been mined by Federalist engineers. If the U. S. Marines are going to use the railroad we've got to see that they're warned in time of that. Perhaps—couldn't I hurry back to the gunboat now, and send a message by radio?—"

He paused, awaiting Don José's answer. The silence of the room was, at the moment, intense, unnerving. The sound of a moth beating itself to death against a golden lamp reached his ears eerily magnified. The clock above the glimmering marble mantelpiece whirred tentatively, and struck the half-hour.

"I am supposed to know nothing of Federalist treacheries," he heard Don José replying coolly. "Your soldiers must find out such things for themselves; I cannot allow you to use the gunboat's wireless for such idle matters. Moreover—" he smiled slowly, "if the Federalists were, by chance, to get into trouble with the United States as a result of their own evil it would be all the better for our cause."

Everett, aghast, involuntarily stepped back.

"Good God! You don't—you can't mean that you'd want to risk the lives of a trainload of men for a possible political benefit?"

And then Don José seemed to undergo a transformation before his eyes. He rose, towering, from his chair; his face livid, his mobile lips twitching queerly. Everett saw, dimly, the knotted veins protruding upon his temples. . . .

"You little fool!" he snarled. "The Federalists will dig their own grave, and if they bury a pack of your cursed, interfering soldiers in it, so much the better. It will be no affair of mine. I forbid you—hear me—to mention this San Jacinto mine to another human soul——"

Everett laughed suddenly—shrilly.

"You can't forbid me!" he cried. "I'm going now—to send a warning."

He had, as he spoke, commenced to back slowly toward the library door, which he knew was somewhere not far behind him; his hand groped, behind his back, frantically, for the knob of the door. Don José made a swift, sudden movement, and the barrel of a revolver gleamed, levelled, in the lamplight.

"Don't move," he commanded. "I mean it. I have no time to waste with useless heroics——"

At last his hand found the wall behind him. He knew, with sinking heart, that he had misjudged the situation of the door by, perhaps, two or three feet. A wave of mingled terror and defiance swept over him. Standing motionless, yet allowing his hand to still move with infinite caution, he parried desperately for time.

"What do you intend to do with me?"

"I am going to compel you to listen to reason."

His fingers closed feverishly upon a hard, solid object that protruded from the sheer smoothness of the wall. Giddy, triumphant exultation surged through him; he laughed, outright, at Don José; his fingers turned. . . . The room was instantly in darkness. He whirled about, groping blindly, wildly, for the door. . . . A vivid orange flame leapt across the blackness, followed by a deafening, stunning report. Something, at the same instant, sang past his head; struck the wall with a whip-like crack. . . . He found the door and opened it; plunged down the hall, out of the house. He was conscious of Don José's heavy, clattering steps upon the tiles, close behind him.

The garden was impenetrably black, pervaded by an uncanny stillness. A few heavy drops of rain were falling, bringing acutely to his nostrils the pungent smell of earth. He found his way at last, stumbling, to the gate; attained the open road. He broke into a run, Don José's footsteps persistently audible behind him.

He skirted the garden wall, a gray streak topped by a blurred mass of foliage. Just as he reached the end of the wall, came abreast of the narrow archway that led into the adjacent garden, a white figure resolved itself suddenly out of the deep obscurity ahead of him; barred his way. He paused, undetermined, heart hammering in his throat.

Before he could grasp her intentions Bianca had swept him through the archway; pushed him, crouching, against the inside of the wall. He tried to speak, but felt the warm palm of her hand sealing his lips.

"Don't speak," she whispered. "He will go by; he will never think to stop——"

Hot, trembling fingers clutched his desperately as the heavy footsteps became audible, jogging by on the road; then fading gradually into the distance. They waited—in utter silence, with stifled breaths. The minutes, as they passed, seemed infinite, measureless. . . . At last they heard him returning with unwilling, lagging steps that were eloquent of failure. The door of the Casa Azul was slammed to, viciously.

III

The storm burst, then, with furious intensity upon them, and they hurried through the garden to seek the shelter of the verandah. The night wind lashed the yielding trunks of the palms, tore through swaying, rustling foliage. Rain came, suddenly, in an opaque, blinding sheet that struck the hard earth beneath their feet with a sound like that of beating drums, a sound that gradually increased to a rhythmic, obliterating roar. Doors in the villa swung on their hinges, and crashed; the flame of a solitary candle burning in an upper-story window flickered uncertainly, and went out.

"How—did you know that I was here?" he gasped as they reached the verandah. She lowered the flame of a swinging lamp, cautiously, and turned to him in the semi-darkness.

"I was watching from my window," she said, "and saw the gunboat entering the harbor. Then, about an hour later, you and a man in naval uniform arrived at the Casa Azul. Tell me, quickly, what has happened. You—you have broken with Don José?"

He told her hurriedly all that had occurred.

"And so the end has come," he concluded bitterly. "My God, Bianca, I don't know what it is—but I had felt lately that something was wrong—something hidden, lurking behind it all. I must have been right, for America has come in—to intervene. Don José's little army won't be worth a damn—now."

Suddenly, in a complete revulsion of mood, he gathered her into his arms.

"I've got to go. God knows I can't help it—you will understand that . . . those fellows riding to certain death in the tunnel, tomorrow morning. Something's got to be done. You wouldn't have me do nothing, Bianca?"

He felt immense, grateful relief when, after a pause, she shook her head.

"I understand," she told him in a frightened, poignant undertone. "It's your duty, of course. Men—at least, a great many men—rate duty higher

than anything else. They're different from women—" her voice wavered pitifully. "But, oh, Everett, it means—it means that you're never coming back; that I'm never to see you again!"

Her arms were about his neck in a tightening, clinging embrace, her cheek, wet with tears, pressed to his. He was supremely conscious of the quivering of her lithe body, racked with uncontrolled, unashamed grief. Something of the old allurements of her penetrated him, haunting memories of the compelling vividness of her charms. . . . A wave of passionate emotion rose within him, ready to sweep him away in its unruly strength; he fought it, with a tremendous effort, to a reasoning calm.

"Suppose," he whispered—and he heard his own voice in a curious, objective way, as if someone else were speaking—"suppose you come with me, Bianca. We can share our lives together——"

She interrupted him with a bitter little laugh, through her tears.

"Don't talk nonsense. All beautiful things, as I once told you, come to an end—" A wave of resignation seemed to have enveloped her, imparting something of its essence to him; caused him the more to realize the futility of his urgings. "We human fools make our greatest, most tragic mistake, my dearest, when we wilfully defy what is intended for us—" her voice trembled, broke to an almost incoherent whisper. "It is written, as

clearly as possible, that our happiness is over; that you and I are to part."

Of a sudden she seemed to recover her equanimity. he spoke, presently, in a new, matter-of-fact voice.

"How are you going to send this news to the Americans?"

"By radio," he told her, "from the gunboat. She isn't due to sail until dawn."

As if for an answer she pointed toward the distant harbor, through a rift in the swirling foliage of the garden. A green light, swaying at a masthead, was travelling swiftly seawards. He was momentarily stunned, appalled. The thing dawned, then, clearly upon him. Mores had been given new orders, in the library, while he had waited, an unknowing fool, upon the threshold. . . .

Bianca remained silent, and he knew instinctively that no help would come from her. He spoke, resolutely.

"I'll follow the railway line. It's about forty kilometers. I could walk it in six hours. Yes; there'll be time."

She clung to him desperately then.

"Stay, just a moment more—a last, happy moment."

He attempted to kiss her but she drew away, offering a surprising, unlooked-for resistance.

"You don't understand," she whispered gently. "Love isn't all—passion. I only wanted to sit by

you, oh, so quietly, for a little moment before you go."

And so they sat down in mute silence, her hand resting lightly in his, until the distant bells of the Santa Palma Cathedral boomed the hour of one. As he rose to leave she unfastened something from her neck, slipped it swiftly over his head—a thin golden chain bearing a pendent, symbolic figure.

"It will protect you," she assured him with a grave, childlike certainty. "It has been blessed by a holy man. And now go, my precious. *Vaya con Dios.*"

She drew his head down. For a timeless moment her lips clung to his in a fierce, yielding kiss as if she were endeavoring to surrender to him for this last time something of her supreme vitality—her very soul; then she fled from him, became a blurred, pathetic figure on the glimmering threshold. He stumbled out into the darkness, conscious of a rising contraction in his throat; that his eyes were moist. . . . A faintly cool breeze fanned his hot cheeks as he turned into the road and headed toward Santa Palma, mechanically, like a man in some witless trance.

CHAPTER IX

I

THERE was no degree of permanence to the cool respite granted by the storm. Dawn came in a coppery haze of inert heat, through which the sun burst to flood the earth for yet another twelve hours in its pitiless glare. It infuriated Everett with its implacability. It was a senseless, brutal sun, he thought, as he sat down to rest his weary body in the inadequate shade of some palmettos whose leaves were already withered to a sickly yollow by the perpetual heat.

Hope was ebbing. A wave of despair seized him as he attained the crest of the palmetto-fringed ridge above the Vega Real. All night long he had been climbing, climbing, relentlessly, to reach it—at first through the winding maze of Santa Palma's lightless, deserted streets, crouching again and again in some obscene alley to avoid detection by an occasional Federalist patrol. Two hours of walking had seen him safely beyond the Federalist territory, and into the suburban heights of Santo Cerro which were in the hands of Liberationist outposts—now also to be reckoned as his enemies.

He had reached the hillside terminus of the Rivadavia railway to find it barren and lightless, and left it in the swift realization that there was little likelihood of a train leaving there for many a day. He had climbed onward and upward, following the steep incline of the single track with its central rack-and-pinion rail, in the dim light of a late moon that peered feebly through the tattered cloud remnants of the storm. Dawn found him at the summit of the ridge, and the coincident discovery from a railway sign that he was scarcely ten kilometers from Santa Palma was the cause of his complete dismay.

He told himself by means of a swift calculation that he would be unable to reach Rivadavia, thirty kilometers away, even with the aid of daylight, before half past nine, or ten o'clock; and that might prove too late. . . . Already his throat was parched, the soles of his feet aching from the long, stumbling climb. The sun, too, seemed malignantly to rejoice at his misery. Waves of shimmering heat rose in the air ahead of him from between the gleaming metal bands of the railway. Thirty kilometers more . . . the lives of a trainload of men depending solely upon his own fortitude. . . . He stumbled on.

As he resumed his way along the ridge, after the brief and blessed pause, he could discern, away down on the gray-green undulated carpet of the Vega Real, a khaki-clad group of *Valientes* gathered at

a spot perhaps five hundred yards from the outskirts of a primitive thatched village. They occupied the summit of a tiny knoll on the plain, and he could see them hovering anxiously about a fixed object that gleamed sharply in the sunshine—a machine gun, he concluded. The men worked with feverish haste, and distance lent to their movements a certain comic diminutiveness; they were, for all the world, like dancing cardboard figures.

And then, as he was watching them, there appeared suddenly at the crest of the white road that climbed up from the direction of Santa Palma a compact green and red mass, moving forward with a relentless, clockwork precision toward the thatched village. He caught, too, a momentary flash of bayonets in the sun. The doll-like figures upon the knoll became fantastically animated. A white puff of smoke rose lazily into the air, and there reached his ears a prolonged, infuriated stuttering. . . . The colored patch upon the road paused in its advance, wavered oddly; broke hurriedly into minute, detached fragments that scattered in all directions. Two motionless specks remained, blurring the chalk-white surface of the road.

The voices of the *Valientes*, hoarsely exultant, reached him as they moved forward triumphantly toward the village.

He continued on his way. The line skirted the margin of the plain for another three kilometers,

then dipped into a widening valley greenly fertile with ripening tobacco. He reached, presently, a straggling village of dilapidated roofless huts, the white plaster walls of which were cracked and gaping to the sunshine. He caught a glimpse, as he passed, of a haggard old woman cooking plantains upon an open-air charcoal brazier; children, brown and shamelessly naked, sprawling in the white dust at her feet; an untidy clutter of red Carib pottery and gourds, dripping with grease, suspended from wooden skewers. An offensive odor that betrayed a lack of drainage assailed his nostrils. . . . A hopeless people, he mused as he hurried along; it would take more than one Don José to lift such as these out of their complacent squalor; more than one upheaval to open their eyes to what the outer world called civilization.

He came upon the station, a square construction of white stucco with a corrugated iron roof, a narrow gravelled platform with a solitary drooping semaphore above it. The place was, apparently, deserted. He learned from a sign adorning the stucco walls that the name of the village was Paraiso. He laughed aloud, wishing Don José could have seen that; it was, in a way, as ironical a comment upon Esperanzan temperament as he had yet come across.

Beyond the station he made an unexpected discovery—a hand car, deserted, lying idle upon a rusty, grass-grown spur of track. It did not take

him long to reach a decision. He glanced about hurriedly; no one was in sight. He approached the car; gave it a push, and found to his joy that it rolled easily to his touch. He maneuvered it down the spur to the main line, clambered aboard and sat down on the insecure, saddle-shaped seat; the lever responded to his efforts, and a moment later he began to glide down the long, straight stretch of track that led toward a horizon of purple hills. The grade proved slightly downward and the fragile wheels of the car, gathering speed with every thrust of his arms, broke into a shrill song.

Some few kilometers from the village he swept down a dip in the track, left the tobacco fields and plunged suddenly into a thickening forest of gum trees. Wild fig ferns lined the margin of the road-bed in a riotous profusion of wavering foliage. The blueness of the sky overhead became gradually obscured, only faintly visible through a tangled ceiling of interwoven branches. The morning air was, of a sudden, penetratingly damp as he rolled onward into a green, primeval world.

II

Nine o'clock by his watch, and he had emerged from the forest. The aspect of the country about him changed rapidly. Vegetation grew sparser, finally giving way to a black desert strewn with rugged fragments of volcanic boulders. The track ahead of him rose sharply to an irregular skyline

of rock, and the hand car, despite his vigorous efforts, slackened perceptibly in its speed. He flung off his coat, set to work with increasing energy; the muscles stood out rigid upon his arms, sweat poured down his cheeks. The hand car became, all at once, a tremendous, unwieldy affair.

The grade assumed an acute steepness; the wheels of the car scarcely revolved. He labored desperately and, at last, after a torturing ten minutes that seemed a whole æon of time, breasted the summit of the climb; stopped, at the point of exhaustion.

He seemed to have reached the crest of the world; a limitless panorama stretched to infinity, far below him. Away off on the horizon he could see the Caribbean glimmering through a transparent, colorless haze. Beneath him the volcanic range on which he stood descended sheerly to pallid fields of sugar-cane that sloped to the sea many, many kilometers away. He could trace the gleam of the railway track, here and there, as it descended in zigzagging uncertainty, clinging insecurely to the barren, boulder-strewn mountainside. There were hairpin curves that sent a qualm of uneasiness through him at the prospect of the descent he had to make. At one point, about half way down the mountain, the track was swallowed up from view, to reappear again some five hundred yards below at a totally unexpected spot. It occurred to him, instantly, that this must be the San Jacinto tunnel.

The situation, he decided, required careful deliberation. He could not pass through the tunnel, he knew, because of the mine. He realized with an overwhelming sense of disappointment that he would be compelled to abandon the car at the mouth of the tunnel, scramble down the slope of the mountain to the track below as best he could, and continue to Rivadavia on foot—there appeared to be no alternative.

As he stood there undetermined, fraught with a hundred anxieties, there came drifting upward into the clear sky above him a cloud of vaporous white smoke; it expanded lazily upon the still air, broke into irregular fragments, obscuring the distant glimmer of the sea—and, at precisely the same instant, there reached his ears a faint but insistent metallic clatter. Thunderstruck, he stepped forward to the edge of the ridge and peered downward. Far below him a toy train was puffing around a gentle curve, starting the ascent of the mountainside. He could distinguish an absurd, miniature locomotive, a straggling line of flat cars; could even discern the gleam of frantically revolving piston rods. And then it dawned upon him, as he looked, that the flat cars were not empty, but full—crowded with a blurred, indistinct freight. . . . Men; hundreds of men packed together!

He knew with a terrifying certainty that he must reach the tunnel before the train. Everything was happening so quickly; if only he had time

to think! . . . He started the hand car rolling down the steep gradient; jumped upon it. Gathering momentum with every foot of progress it plunged downward in a swaying, uncontrolled flight. As he swept giddily around the first of the acute curves, clinging desperately to his insecure seat, a kind of primitive exultation seized him. He knew that he had definitely, for the first time in his life, a supreme duty to accomplish; if he were to die—the thought reached him, unaccompanied by any sense of terror—then, at least the dying would be worth while. . . . He discovered that he was getting nearer to the train; he could hear now the relentless puffing labor of the locomotive somewhere just below him, and the harsh shriek of car wheels rounding a curve. The thin, quavering note of a whistle drifted up to him. All at once, as he swept around yet another bend in the track, he saw the black horseshoe of the tunnel stamped in a sheer, towering wall of rock directly ahead of him. A profusion of half-formed thoughts came crowding chaotically to his brain; but his limbs seemed powerless; his head was spinning. How now,—how was this thing to be accomplished? . . . The swaying car reached another dip in the track, leapt onward as if endowed with wings. He tried to apply the brake, but the fragile lever snapped off derisively in his fingers. The tunnel grew; became a menacing black maw—and at that instant the problem solved itself. He stood up, swaying,

like a reed blown in a hurricane; leapt, just before the car shot into the mouth of the tunnel.

He struck the jagged flint of the roadbed with a terrific, blinding impact. Flashes of amazing light seared across his vision. He tried to raise himself. Of a sudden the whole world was rent asunder in a shattering, cosmic roar; he had a momentary glimpse of rocks hurtling through the air; falling in a vicious shower upon him—crushing him down, down, into a gathering oblivion; through which he was only conscious of overwhelming pain. . . .

III

Voices penetrated the void that enveloped him; voices that were miles and miles away, infinitely remote from his presence. "... Oh, it was mined all right... we'd have been blown to hell. . . ." "... Carry him down to the train. . . . Hurry, you fellows!" A pause. Then: "... Give us time, Sergeant. The guy's heavy. . . ."

The sounds faded away in the obliterating numbness that again once crept over him.

CHAPTER X

I

THE door at the far end of the long whitewashed room opened and Corporal Flannigan appeared, grinning as usual. Everett sat up in bed to greet him. Corporal Flannigan had proven a good friend; it was he who brought him his meals three times a day upon a tray; who left tattered bundles of American magazines, occasionally, upon his bed.

There was really nothing to do but read, or think—and thinking made him frantically restless, anxious to be up and about—so that the Corporal's magazines had become quite precious things.

He had been in bed now for several weeks, he surmised, but he was not at all sure. Time had recently become an almost meaningless factor in his existence. A period of blackness, pain, and unwieldy dreams separated distinctly his present life from his old life that had ended so abruptly at the mouth of the San Jacinto tunnel upon that stifling morning. The pain in his thigh and leg had subsided during the past two days, but the heavy contrivance of bandage and splints was irritating, confined his movements to a minimum. Still, he

was able now to think clearly, and that alone was a blessed relief. No longer were there torturing nights, voices hovering about him: "Take this . . . steady now . . . there; that's better."

There had been, so far, only two visitors to his bedside whom he could positively remember. Corporal Flannigan, freckled-faced, snub-nosed, with an unruly crest of reddish hair; perpetual humor in his blue eyes and mobile mouth—a man to cheer any invalid. Then there was the doctor, a nervous, fussy little man with a sharp, brown face and enormous horn-rimmed spectacles, who looked weirdly unbecoming in his badly-creased uniform—not cut out for a soldier, perhaps, but none the less an admirable doctor. Once, when he had thrust a spoonful of bitter black liquid into his parched mouth, Everett had spit it out, flung his arms in the air and cried:

"Oh, for God's sake, leave my stomach alone . . . it's my leg that hurts. Can't you see that?"

Whereupon the doctor, very quietly, had filled the spoon again; overcome him by sheer force of his wiry arms and thrust the nauseous mixture down his throat, saying perfectly gently:

"Damn you, you're going to live if I can help it."

Everett smiled whenever he thought of the doctor after that.

Corporal Flannigan approached his bed; roused him from his reveries.

"Say!" he whispered importantly. "The Major's outside; he'd like to talk to you. Think you're up to it?"

Everett nodded. Here was relief indeed from the drowsy monotony of another long afternoon. He sat up in bed, unconsciously smoothing his rumpled hair. A visit from the Major promised many things for which he had been impatiently waiting—news of the outside world from which he had been so completely removed. He would, he decided, ask a number of questions. . . . He stared, as he waited for the Major, distastefully at his surroundings—the long, low, sparsely furnished room with its white pine floor and unadorned, whitewashed walls. It had formed part of the Rivadavia customs house, he had learned from Flannigan, before the Marines seized it and turned the place into a barracks. Through a glassless, barred aperture in the wall opposite his bed he could see the harbor, gold-tinted in the late afternoon sunshine, and an American destroyer, four-funnelled, lean and businesslike, riding at anchor perhaps a hundred yards from the jetty, white-capped figures toiling leisurely upon the foredeck. Through the open window, too, came the distant shuffle of many feet and, now and then, a peremptory, commanding bark that was dear music to his ears: "Order h-arms!" The thud of rifle butts, dropping as one movement upon the cobbled quay. And presently: "A-at ease . . . Rest!" . . .

The drone of low voices, speaking—thank God—his own tongue.

The door at the far end of the room opened again, and a man entered—a tall, spare man with a hawklike face tanned to a deep reddish brown, a predatory nose springing from between the deepest black eyes; a close-clipped mustache that failed to conceal a stern, straight mouth. Everett liked him instantly; liked, too, his sombre yet smart uniform with its row of campaign ribbons, the gleaming sharpshooter badge pendent upon the chest, the sharply-creased campaign hat worn well forward over gray eyebrows.

The Major drew up a chair; chatted easily for a minute or two, making politely conventional enquiries concerning the progress of his convalescence. Then, with a quick movement of his alert head, he flung a question at him:

“How was it that you were coming down the railroad to Rivadavia on a hand car, with the country in the midst of a revolution? Didn’t you know that you were taking a pretty big risk—with those *guerilleros* ambushed all over the place?”

Quietly Everett answered:

“I had heard from one of Rodriguez’s men that the San Jacinto tunnel was mined. I didn’t know whether the Federalists would warn you—and I wasn’t going to take any chances.”

“Hum,” said the Major, and rubbed his chin. “As it happened, none of the Federalists got near

enough to Rivadavia to warn us. The whole town was in rebel hands, as you probably know, when we landed——”

Impulsively he thrust forward his hand; seized Everett's in a short, swift grip.

“We owe, probably, the lives of two companies to your action. The thing's too big to thank you for—but you'll hear more of it, if I have any say——”

He coughed nervously; sought abruptly another subject.

“Mind if I ask a few questions?”

“Not at all, Major.”

“Well, now—hum—you seem to have been pretty thick with these revolutionists. It's queer, taking into consideration the fact that you're an American.”

Frankly Everett told him the whole story—omitting, only, any reference to Bianca Valdez. He was not eloquent; he floundered time and again in his choice of words; yet, on the whole, he was able to present a fairly coherent story of his life in Esperanza. The Major listened gravely, eyeing him now and then, when he mentioned certain incidents, with a piercing and disconcerting intensity.

“—And so,” he said when Everett had concluded, “you quit this rebel gang when you found out who was backing them?”

Everett was at once perplexed at the question.

“Why, no. I quit because I had to—because

they wouldn't allow me to send you a radio about the tunnel; I thought I'd made that clear. I wish you'd tell me now just why the United States started this intervention; it's been puzzling me a good deal."

The Major appeared incredulous.

"Mean to say you don't know?"

Everett shook his head.

"Well!" said the Major. "That's the queerest thing you've told me yet." He drew his chair nearer to the bed. "Under present circumstances I'm hardly at liberty to tell you all I know, but I can give you the gist of the thing. It will open your eyes to a new aspect of your—eh—former companions.

"—This Rodriguez man; his motives in the beginning were all right—fine. He wanted to gain a place in the world for his country; saw it going to the dogs, worse and worse each year—and couldn't stand it. So far, so good. The United States wouldn't think of butting in on a wholly altruistic proposition of that kind—but here's where the trouble came. The man needed thousands of dollars, perhaps half a million, to carry out his plans properly in the modern fashion he'd conceived them; he wanted rifles, machine guns of the latest type—even an aeroplane. His was a far-visioned mind, and he figured that up-to-date implements of war would win him success in a few days against the obsolete equipment of the Esperanzan military

clique. Now, where did he turn to get the money? First his personal fortune went——”

“And then there were subscriptions among his followers,” Everett interposed.

“Right—but all that was but a drop in the bucket; I see that you hadn’t realized that. Well—where did he turn to get the sum he needed? America? No—that wasn’t safe. He got the money from Europe, from a powerful syndicate of Central and Eastern European financiers, backed up by their governments. A man called Tegel who has caused endless trouble in Russia acted as agent for them. They granted the funds in return for certain concessions to be given as soon as the revolution had succeeded. And those concessions—Good Lord! The United States has since investigated them, because it heard of the deal through some newspaper man down on the island here. The whole thing amounted to a practical monopoly of the republic, a subsidy of every industry in the place; tobacco, coffee, sugar, fruit—and there is known to be some valuable nitrate property, too, on the southern coast that hasn’t yet been exploited.

“You see what that would mean. In a few short years Esperanza would practically pass to the control of Europeans; it would be a colony in everything but name—a colony not eight hundred miles north of the Canal Zone and not three hundred south of Porto Rico and the Virgin Isles. In the light of certain events between the years of 1914 and

1918 that proposition, Mr. Gail, was not good enough for the United States to acquiesce in. That's all there is to it. We intervened purely to maintain Esperanza's independence."

He rose to leave. Everett lay back in bed, speechless, lost in thought.

"Cheer up," the Major called back over his shoulder. "We're going to ship you home in a very few days."

"Oh," said Everett. He could think of nothing else to say. He wanted to be left alone, to be allowed to work these tremendous problems out for himself. He realized, all at once, his own laughable unimportance; the futility of the part he had played in a gigantic conspiracy. They had used him; tricked him too. . . . A growing flame of resentment was kindled within him at the thought.

II

He was up and about a week later, aiding his somewhat shaky progress by means of a pair of stout sticks Corporal Flannigan had fashioned for him. His movements were confined to the jetty on which the barracks were situated, because the Major had dropped a hint that it would not be wise for him to penetrate the tortuous streets of Rivadavia.

"Some of the more ignorant *Valientes* have it in for you," he explained. "They've got it in their

stupid heads that you were somehow responsible for our intervention."

On hearing this he reflected, humorously, that he had managed at last to attain a quite magnificent importance. The Major also informed him that he was to be taken back to America on the destroyer *Farragut*, which was due to sail in two days; she would probably call at Santa Palma on her way north, he added. This brought back to him forcibly thoughts of Bianca. He knew, definitely, that he must see her before he left . . . just why, he couldn't tell; yet the urge was unequivocal.

Meanwhile the Marines patrolled the streets of Rivadavia, as they were patrolling Santa Palma and Los Barrios, restoring some semblance of order amongst the terrified inhabitants, pacing the sun-baked cobbles with grim precision, all the while giving vent to the profanest opinions concerning the Esperanzans, and Esperanza in general. Little or no trouble occurred in Rivadavia; the wave of sentiment for Don José had swiftly died down now that it had become known that he had incurred the displeasure of the United States by securing funds from a syndicate of foreign *capitalistas*. The Rivadavians had no desire to lose the coffee trade they had built up with the United States; they were a people, as Don José had once remarked, who knew on which side their bread was buttered. During the Marine occupation they obeyed all orders of the Commandant mechanically, the while devoutly praying that

the horde of stern *Americanos* would soon clear out of the place and leave them to their own peaceful devices.

There was a storm the night before Everett was due to sail; the sun sank in a coppery mist beneath a billowing horizon; the sea, churned to a wild froth, was the color of a snake's back. Breakers dashed in impotent rage, again and again, over the breakwater of the harbor. Night came on with an appalling swiftness, and with it torrents of rain.

At nine o'clock he hobbled out of the barracks, passed the sentry, on his way to a nearby bodega to purchase some cigarettes. His progress along the wind-swept quay was difficult, his body bent to the teeth of the gale. As he neared the bodega a figure crept into the slanting lamplight of its windows, almost collided with him. It was Hoya—Don José's negro chauffeur. Everett called his name aloud; the man halted, eyeing him with frigid suspicion.

"Come in here," Everett said, his hand upon the bodega door. "I want—to ask you a few questions."

The negro, shivering, followed him after a moment's hesitation into the lighted warmth of the shop.

They selected a deserted corner of the room.

"What does the Señor want of me?" Hoya asked, glancing nervously about him. "I am on my way to my home in the south. I cannot stay here long; this town is unsafe for one who has been in Don José's employ."

"I won't detain you long," Everett assured him, thrusting a ten peseta note into his hand; the man looked hungry, he thought; destitute. "Tell me now, where is Don José?"

Hoya shrugged his shoulders.

"*Dios*, Señor I cannot say. The Federalists yesterday offered a large price for his capture—and, this morning Don José and the European made their escape in a tiny *barca*." He glanced out through the streaming windows into the torrential blackness of the night. "If they reach another land it will be a miracle—but perhaps, after all, it would be better. . . . Don José's dreams are broken; and he lived for his dreams."

"—And Señora Valdez?" Everett asked, with as much casualness as he could muster.

It seemed to him that the negro eyed him a trifle curiously before replying.

"Señora Valdez? Let me think— Ah, I remember now. She was wounded, Señor, upon the very steps of her villa by a stray bullet from a cursed Federalists sniper." He flung his arms upward in a gesture of utter despair. "Oh, Señor, all happiness is over. Our world has come to an end. The fighting at Santa Palma was terrible; the *Valientes* never held the town for a day. My master has fled; the house has been taken from us. Where now can a *miserable* like myself go?"

He began to whimper, but ceased in abrupt terror as Everett gripped his arm.

"Tell me, quick—where is she?"

"I—I think," he stammered, "she was taken to the Hospital of the Holy Sisters in Santa Palma——"

Everett left him; made his way mechanically, blindly, toward the door of the bodega. Bianca wounded, he thought desperately, helpless in some dreadful hospital—perhaps dying. . . . Don José a fugitive in an open boat upon a merciless sea. Their little world had indeed come to an end. A trite old phrase of schoolroom days leapt to his mind, lingered obdurately—*sic transit gloria*. . . . He knew now that he must, at any cost, get to Bianca.

CHAPTER XI

I

THE United States destroyer *Farragut*, on her way northward, cast anchor opposite the crumbling gray walls of El Morro de Santa Palma at noon. Everett, standing impatiently in her bows, watched the negligent progress of the harbor official's launch as it approached across the glassy stretch of water. Gazing toward the clustered, sunbaked roofs of Santa Palma he was impressed, unpleasantly, by the heavy sense of stillness that hung over the town; not a sound of human life reached him from across the bare quarter of a mile of water; the Marina was a deserted, forlorn expanse of cobblestones and shuttered houses. Like a city plunged in a trance, he thought uneasily.

He looked westward toward the palm-fringed neck of land that edged the harbor, veering seaward in a lazy curve, and saw once more the square uncompromising bulk of the Casa Azul, defiant and stolid above the wavering palm tops; he could see that its windows, too, were shuttered. What, exactly, had happened during his absence? He wanted,

frantically, to get ashore and to find out a hundred and one things—principally to see Bianca. . . . His half-formulated plans were interrupted by the grating of the harbor launch against the destroyer's side, the sound of voices, Spanish and English intermingled, querulous . . . the endless red tape of Esperanzan officialdom.

At the chart room door he ran across the Commander of the destroyer pacing the deck, frowning over a mass of typewritten documents in his hands. He glanced at Everett with the look of a harassed man.

"Sir," said Everett respectfully, "I'd like to go ashore—" he began to stumble over his words, moved his fingers nervously, "—question of—of a dear friend. Maybe dying—" He gulped out the last words. The Commander jerked a thumb toward the rope ladder swinging from amidships.

"Go ahead—but be back within two hours. I want to clear out of this hell hole as soon as I can; there's a rumor of fever——"

Gratefully Everett thanked him; clambered down the insecure ladder and hailed the native officer in the boat.

"Ashore! Fifty pesetas if you'll get me there."

He knew, by now, Esperanzan cupidity; the gold-laced pretension of the man left him unawed. He saw with some relief that his offer was immediately accepted.

As he went aboard the launch the thought that

Bianca might be dying tore at his heart like a tiny blade scraping a wound that had nearly healed.

II

Ashore he came upon a nightmare of a town—sunbeaten, parched streets, stinking, deserted but for the occasional passing of a Marine squad, bayoneted Springfields at the shoulder, marching with the precision of automatons. Now and then he came across a yellow sign, swinging from a corner lamp-post, warning pedestrians of an outbreak of the Pest—urging them to kill all rats at sight. . . . Patches of blood at frequent intervals upon the pavement, drying a hideous brown in the torrid sun; sometimes a tattered fragment of uniform, a broken rifle lying in the gutter. Under the tamarinds of the Plaza Nacional he stumbled suddenly upon a more horrid reminder of recent events—the body of a Federalist soldier, crumpled up, wide-open eyes staring awfully at the sky; gaping, leering mouth. . . . He hurried on, shuddering, past two Marines who were loading a wagon with other bodies. More pools of blood, and thousands of flies buzzing angrily above the sidewalk in dense, wavering black clouds.

In a side street above the Plaza he caught sight of a wretched family, furniture piled untidily about them on a two-wheeled cart; a man with a bandaged head ferociously whipping a donkey that staggered under its burden. A girl, white-faced and weeping,

sitting on the steps of a deserted house with a squalling infant pressed to her immature breast. . . . All supply of food and water had been cut off from the city; families were fleeing in mad haste from the barren, plague-ridden streets. So had ended Don José's magnificent adventure.

He came at last to the hospital, a low adobe building with a blatantly new roof of corrugated iron, a worn flight of steps leading to swinging doors of wire netting. At the end of a dark passage he discovered an interne washing a hypodermic needle in a perfunctory manner beneath a dripping faucet. He asked whether he might see Señora Valdez. The man eyed him suspiciously for an instant.

"You will find her at 42 bis. We removed her to a more quiet place—the hospital is at present full of soldiers."

He hurried on, with growing fear, up the street, and presently reached 42 bis, a severely plain house of yellow plaster. There was no bell at the door, but it bore a bronze tablet upon its panels:

THE LITTLE SISTERS OF MERCY

He entered; groped his way, stumbling, the length of a narrow, unlit passage—came at last to a closed door. Within he heard voices; women's voices. His knock was answered by a wrinkled old woman in an untidy cotton dress who looked at him with the peering scrutiny of feeble vision.

"Is Señora Valdez here?" he demanded. "If so, tell her—tell her that Mr. Gail would like to see her."

The woman's eyes widened perceptibly; she nodded in a queer, understanding way that perplexed him and signified that he was to enter the room. He found himself in a dimly-lighted chamber, the jalousied windows of which permitted only six parallel rays of sunshine to filter uncertainly upon a tiled floor; there was a niche in the plaster walls containing a colored crucifix; some stiff waxen lilies . . . a table littered with medicine bottles and a tumbler or two, drawn close to a small iron bedstead. The air was faintly fragrant with lavender. . . . Then he saw her.

Her eyes were closed, the lids transparently blue in startling contrast to the pallor of her face. Her black hair in long, waving tresses framed her cheeks, tumbled in a billowing wave over the white surface of the pillow. He approached the bed. Eyes opened, slowly, at the sound of his footsteps; gazed at him uncomprehendingly—then suffused swiftly to a liquid radiance.

"Everett!" she said, and raised her head with an infinite effort. He seized her hand, hot and dry and throbbing; held it despairingly. The old woman hovered beside him for a moment, after which she retired to a far corner of the room to become absorbed in the task of shaking down a thermometer.

Everett nodded towards her back.

"Who is she?"

"An old servant," Bianca murmured, ". . . devoted. She—she understands about you, I think, Everett."

He studied her in silence for a long instant, and renewed fear surged into him at the tragic frailness of her. She seemed to have become very, very young, helpless, unutterably fragile.

"You're going to get well," he assured her conventionally, and with an effort, because in his heart he knew he was lying.

Her eyes were ineffably bright. In a sudden bewildering little access of strength she sat up.

"Perhaps—but you are going home, Everett. Oh, yes. I have heard the news from Don José." She paused; her voice dropped to an almost incoherent whisper. "Remember, Everett, your promise. You are not to be unhappy for me. I have been very happy—and, after this, I must be only one of your dreams." Her voice trailed away remotely. "I'm—so tired," she murmured.

Her head slipped back to the pillow; eyes closed, as if that valiant effort had crushed her remaining, pitiful strength. He felt at the same moment a hand upon his shoulder; heard a man's gruff yet not unkindly voice:

"You must go—my patient is not to be disturbed."

In a sudden, sharp movement the doctor brushed past him; bent low over the bed as eyelids fluttered uncertainly.

Everett stumbled blindly from the room. Out-

side in the dark passage he waited, with pounding heart, for many agonizing minutes. And then the doctor came out of the room, closing the door gently behind him.

"It is all over," he said gently; and, in an instant of supreme understanding, patted Everett clumsily upon the shoulder.

He found his way, somehow, into the glare of the street.

A young Marine, leaning idly against the wall of an adjoining house, was whistling a popular melody, his blatant notes splitting the heated stillness of the morning. A primitive, unreasoning rage swept over Everett. Fists clenched, body all atremble, he swayed up to the man.

"Oh, God—stop that!" he sobbed. "Keep your damned happiness to yourself. . . ."

He fled on down the street. The Marine ceased whistling; stared after him in utter amazement.

He was rowed across the harbor, seeing nothing, hearing nothing. The native boatman had to shake him to dull comprehension when they came alongside the destroyer.

III

All that afternoon he sat upon the narrow bunk of his cabin in trancelike immobility waiting, praying, for the ship to take him away, the stunning actuality of Bianca's death obliterating from his mind all other thought.

And yet it was not until he was a considerably older man, able to delve into the past with the serene reasoning of maturity, that he fully realized the extent of the love she had given him, the exquisiteness of her renunciation, her purgatory when—with that instinctive infallibility of hers—she knew that the time had come for them to part. Later, too, when the poignant picture of her had faded to a mellower memory, and he was capable of looking upon facts with less of youth's emotion, he knew that his own love for her had been but a passing, lovely madness, a lambent flame of youth leaping to ecstatic brilliance for brief and glorious moments. . . .

At midnight the *Farragut* weighed anchor; glided out to sea. He went on deck; walked for an hour that seemed an eternity, while the stiff night breeze sent a perpetual shower of crimson sparks dancing down from the funnels and, below, the engines throbbing like the heart of a living creature urged the ship faster and faster across the starlit sea. And as he walked there assailed him that overwhelming desire that leaps unbidding, once in a while, to the hearts of all men, wanderers over the wide face of the earth, for the firelight of home, for the familiar faces of those who were his kind, who understood him—people whose ideas and ideals were, after all, one and the same as his own.

A naval lieutenant, puffing his pipe musingly at the taffrail, addressed him as he passed.

"Those people," he drawled, with a wave of his arm toward the south, "they're cattle; that's all. No souls, no minds. The Lord knows why we let 'em go on making trouble year after year——"

Everett spoke up hotly, in a torrent of words.

"You're wrong," he cried, "all wrong. They've got souls, and minds; they've got their own ambitions and ideals, just as we have. Perhaps they think out things differently; go about things in a hot-headed kind of way—but, after all, that's only temperament. Fundamentally we're all the same. What they wanted was freedom, equality, a happy country—the right to live. My God, I've seen more individual bravery in that dirty little republic in the last four weeks than I ever have before——"

The lieutenant gaped at him; tapped his ashes against the rail; mumbled a curt good night and strolled away.

CHAPTER XII

I

NEW YORK. An island of white towers rising sheerly into the gentle blueness of a March morning. Everett, standing at the destroyer's bow, watched her halting progress up the harbor with mingled satisfaction and impatience. Battery Park glided by, a rustic patch of green oddly out of place at the foot of gargantuan structures of granite and steel. The spring air was filled with the clamoring chorus of throaty whistles; feathers of smoke fluttering at funnels; flags of nations rippling from sterns of ships. A grimy municipal ferryboat, crowded to the rails with pallid, straining faces, paddled by on her prosaic duty. It occurred to him whimsically that she was, in a way, symbolic of the orderly existence to which he was returning; that the *Farragut*, lean and swift and exotic in contrast, was the means to adventure. . . . He was, he realized, quite ready to change ships.

At noon they docked. It all seemed like a dream. He shook hands mechanically with half a dozen officers and men, and stepped ashore. A taxi bore

him perilously through the blatant squalor that New York, most boastful of cities, flaunts in the eyes of hopeful and expectant visitors; under girdered shadows of the elevated; past drug stores, tobacconists, barber shops; signs swinging in the March breeze; eddies of dry, choking dust already whirling along the cobbled chaos of the streets. Fifth Avenue at last, broad and clean, and splendid in its precise, orderly way. The trees fringing Central Park were touched with the earliest hint of vernal green, the morning air suddenly soft and fragrant with a smell of loam.

And then the house, white and towering, complacent as ever.

Brixton opened the door, with a smile that had been obviously prepared for the occasion, but he had no time to spend with Brixton; in the dimness of the hall, at the foot of the curving marble stairs, he saw his mother waiting.

In her arms he felt, all at once, still a little boy.

II

The weeks drifted by serenely. He was conscious of what he considered to be a change of attitude in those about him. His parents, in the first place, had greeted his return with a simple, unmitigated pleasure that he could not ignore. Then his father, quiet and unobtrusive as ever, seemed to seek his company more than before; spent long evenings with him in

the wainscotted library, discussing in his painstaking manner many questions of the moment—politics, world affairs, business. . . . His mother, too, evinced a desire to satisfy his every wish—and yet there were few things that he wanted; he was happy, in a negative way.

Everyone, in fact, appeared to be more tolerant—easier to get on with. And yet it never occurred to him that it was, perhaps, he who had changed; not they. Even Stoddard had apparently lost something of his irritating assurance.

Emily had gone out west for the summer; Margaret Blair, he learned, was away in Europe; would not return until the late autumn.

He spoke rarely of Esperanza, and then only in answer to questions. But when he was alone in his room the experiences of the past came crowding back to him, and from the disordered fantasy of events that whirled through his mind he tried to derive some coherent conclusion. For the first time in his life he applied himself to a study of causes rather than effects.

He had seen men—honest, simple-hearted men—inspired to leave their primitive homes and labors by the fiery words of an apt coiner of phrases; he had seen their vainglorious, tinsel army, sprung up overnight, swaggering to battle, egged on by elementary ideals to crush a growing despotism. He had seen them, in their own surprise at their prowess, grow supremely boastful, convinced of their own invinci-

bility. And then he had witnessed his own country, with but a furtive hint of her latent force, intervene in the struggle—not to crush their pitiful hopes, but to prevent them from becoming unwitting cogs in a ruthless machine.

Human ambition—that was it. The vanities of one man who could lead his fellows on to victory, or utter destruction, with a mere beck of his finger. Pygmies swept on to poverty, disease and death by their naïve enthusiasms. He was, as he pondered over these things, oppressed by a sudden sense of the futility of it all. . . . During those weeks he had lost something irrevocable, he knew. Some of the glamor, the careless ease of youth had departed. Perhaps he had acquired other things more precious. At least he found himself able, as he had never been before, to face the future with a reasoning calm.

III

The telephone at his bedside rang early one April morning. He picked up the receiver and, after an intermittent buzzing had subsided, heard a sharp, incisive voice:

“I want to speak to Mr. Everett Gail.”

Faintly surprised, he announced his presence.

The voice, enunciating each word with admirable clarity, said:

“This is Wardrupp—Editor of *The New York Sphere*. I understand that you recently returned

from Esperanza, and that you have a pretty clear idea of the cause of the whole trouble down there. Am I right?"

"Well—yes," Everett replied wonderingly.

"Good. I want to see you here—Park Row—at ten o'clock. Can you make it? I have a proposal that may interest you."

"What—" Everett began, but only a derisive click echoed in his ears.

The journey downtown in the subway, and to the tenth floor of a great building in a crowded elevator that flashed past rooms trembling with the vibration of gigantic presses, was marked by a sense of growing elation—an elation caused by the hope that he was, at last, to prove himself of some definite use to humanity; that his services were really needed. . . . A slender girl with elaborately coiffed red hair received the card he presented to her in a kind of antagonistic silence; then took it to an inner sanctuary that lay beyond a glass door. She reappeared a moment later and, yawning, raised a beckoning finger.

Wardrupp, an amiable-looking mountain of flesh overflowing the confines of a swivel chair, motioned to him to take a seat and proceeded immediately to announce his proposal; the while he talked he jotted down cabalistic figures upon a yellow pad marked CITY EDITOR.

"The American public is interested in this Esperanza affair, Mr. Gail—more than you probably

believe. The European complications make it a first-rate story. Now, Elbert Wing's report—the only one recently received from that part of the world—was grabbed by one of our competitors, unfortunately for us. However, he's only got half the story, to my mind—the spectator's story, so to speak. What we want is a series of articles by you to cover a period of, say, six or seven Sundays, giving the inside story of the Esperanzan revolution. As to terms——”

He mentioned, presently, a sum that surprised Everett by its magnitude.

“But,” Everett told him, “I’ve never written anything in my life. At least——”

Wardrupp chuckled throatily.

“Have a shot at it. If you’ve done a year’s high school we’ll be able to fix it up for print.”

“Why, I’ve had two years at Yale,” Everett began, on a rising wave of egotistical reminiscence, “and——”

But Wardrupp, seizing the telephone at his side, smiled and gently terminated the interview.

IV

His series in *The New York Sphere* was, without a doubt, one of the few journalistic surprises of that season. He could, it was discovered, write. He did not possess the creative but, rather, the photographic mind. His copy showed crass errors in syntax; his style was crude—but wholly to the

point. Wardrupp, reading aloud the first instalment to the City Editor, said:

"He's almost a human camera, Mac. I've never seen such vividness of impression. Eventually we'll make something big out of him."

Syndicate rights for the series were disposed of promptly. By the middle of June Everett found himself the possessor of a larger bank account than he had ever had before and—more important—an offer that indicated a more or less definite future. It was agreed that he was to spend a year with *The Sphere*; then to go to Europe to cover certain political conferences.

"It's splendid," his father said, "that you've found this ability. You ought to be very happy."

"I am," he said. "Oh—I am."

But he knew in his heart that there was something—something vital lacking. . . .

Summer came. He worked conscientiously, whole-heartedly, at Park Row; became a familiar figure in newspaper circles, and was regarded as one of the more promising of the younger group. Life seemed to run on well-oiled wheels; yet there was—the conviction grew—some essential element lacking; he had a most curious feeling that if he probed deep enough into the recesses of his own mind that he would discover the cause of this, but that he was not yet ready to unearth it. . . . In a mood of sombre reflection he discovered that Time, although it had not the power to obliterate

memories could, at least, soften these. Facts which had once seemed all-embracing, eternally and irrevocably seared upon his brain, had now become but a part of the blurred pathos of the past.

One Saturday afternoon, when his work was completed at three o'clock, he wandered over to Brooklyn Bridge and took a train to Coney Island, alone—a performance which considerably upset his mother when she heard of it.

"He's changing," she remarked anxiously to Gail Senior late that night. "He never before was able to amuse himself without companions."

"That's a sign," his father remarked drily, "of supreme common-sense, when one considers the mental calibre of most of his friends."

His day at Coney Island was prosaic enough until, just at sunset, he went for a ride on the Brighton Beach scenic railway. It so happened that he shared his seat in the front car with a vivid little creature in a jade sweater and plaid skirt, whose features, crassly covered though they were with paint and powder, possessed a certain delicacy that attracted him, as did the sun-gold of her hair visible under the brim of a jaunty little hat of black, soft straw. During the headlong downward flights of the train she gave vent to piercing screams and, now and again, clutched his shoulder with a diminutive hand.

As they glided, with decreasing speed, down the homeward stretch he remarked aloud :

"When you come to think of it, life's sort of like this. First it's slow and sheltered—you're feeling your way to the summit of the first crest, into the open—then the first, terrifying period comes; the first test. If you get beyond that you can usually survive the rest."

She stared at him, blue eyes wide with amazement.

"That's an idea," she said presently. "Indeed it is. The first test was my finish—" she laughed, a trifle metallically. "You look like a nice fellow. Here's hoping you get by safe."

They descended the steps together.

"I'm hungry," he said. "I'm going to have dinner. Show me a good restaurant, and we'll dine together. Crowds always make me lonely."

She was obviously pleased; clung to his arm as they hurried along the seafront, and led him to a blatant open-air dance hall where a mediocre meal was being served to crowds of hot, happy people.

During the meal she told him about herself—the usual story; drudgery at home first; the craving for excitement; the sudden solution offered by a "friend" more persuasive than the rest. She was at present, she informed him, cashier in a Montauk motion picture theatre.

"Still," she concluded, "You can just bet I'm glad I was born in an age when girls are beginning to live. Things are different than they used to be.

I should worry whether I'm living exactly the same life as the girl across the street. You can't write up a bunch of rules for everyone these days—and then say everyone's damned who breaks 'em. . . .”

“You mean,” he said, “that morality's more a matter for individual than collective thinking than it used to be.”

She nodded, approvingly.

“You're swell at putting things into words.”

At the terminus of the electric line, before a long string of lighted cars, she asked in a spirit of submissive calm:

“Where are we going now?”

“I'm going home,” he told her. “I don't know what you're going to do, but I'll say good-bye now—and thanks for being such delightful company.”

Again that look of blank amazement in her eyes.

“I said you were a funny guy,” she remarked thoughtfully, stripping the wrapper off a stick of gum. “I knew it. But, honest, I've had the best time tonight I've had in years. We—we sort of understand each other.”

She hesitated for an instant; then burst out impulsively:

“You're going to get success and happiness—sooner or later. I just feel it in my bones. There's some people Fortune just picks out for winners and stamps her trade-mark on them. Keep on being nice—like tonight—and you can't go far wrong.”

She gave him a little squeeze of her hand, and trotted off toward the distant blare of lights and music.

Of course it was all nonsense but, nevertheless, her prediction, as well as touching him, made him vaguely happy.

CHAPTER XIII

I

STARING into the gathering blue dusk through the frosting windows of the smoking car, Everett realized that the train was at last approaching its destination. Pine-covered hills, white and glimmering against a coppery sunset, marked the limits of the frozen valley through which the train was crawling. The brakeman, ice-coated and flapping his arms, flung himself through the door of the car, followed by a flurry of snow that settled on the floor and became a quickly-growing patch of moisture. A breath of keen air swept through the smoke-laden atmosphere, causing more than one passenger to shiver.

"We'll be there in ten minutes," Stoddard remarked, at his side. "I hope you're in a mood for plenty of gaiety. Mrs. Glamorgan knows how to give a house party; I was up here once last winter when you were away."

Everett nodded almost solemnly; rose to take his suitcase and raccoon coat from the rack. Stoddard, possibly aware of a certain lack of enthusiasm in his response, said:

"A little over a year ago, Evvy, this party would have appealed to you as the essence of good things."

"Maybe it will, still," Everett mused. "I don't really know. You see, it's so long since I've done any kind of celebrating. It depends——"

"There may be attractions," Stoddard ventured.

Everett made no reply.

He continued softly:

"Margaret Blair's going to be there—only got back from Europe last week. And, of course, that adjunct, Hal Jones—but you won't let him count."

Everett turned round sharply. His face, in the dimness of the car, was drawn.

"You knew this all along——?"

"Not until Will Dawson mentioned it to me on the ferry coming over; he's back in the rear car."

"If I'd known that," Everett murmured. "If I'd known that——"

He relapsed into sudden silence. And, then slowly at first, a sense of growing exultation pervaded him, in spite of his determined efforts to remain calm; the queerest, most ridiculous, most glorious feeling. . . . Long before the train reached the station he found himself standing upon the ice-laden platform, bag in hand.

The train came to a halt, eventually, at a shingle station; there were oil lamps gleaming faintly through the dusk; the sound of stamping horses; the tinkle of sleigh bells.

It was nearly seven o'clock when, ahead of their sleigh, the lighted panels of the Glamorgan home leapt out of the shadows at the foot of a white hill. Mrs. Glamorgan, stout and amiable, greeted them in the hall. Everett hurried up to his room, a place of fragile blue furniture, chintz curtains, and dormer windows. He proceeded to dress, with meticulous care, for dinner.

Half an hour later a gong sounded below. He was, he realized with some surprise, suddenly afraid to leave the room; exactly why, he didn't know. It was as if he had stumbled, unwarned, upon some crisis for which he was wholly unprepared.

Half way down the winding oaken stairs, at a landing dimly lighted by a cluster of candles, he came upon Margaret—a virginal symphony in white and gold. She looked up, startled, and there was a faint catch in her breath as she voiced some conventional greeting.

Perhaps the passing months had heightened her youthful beauty; made her even more desirable—or perhaps long absence had crystallized that which he had felt, all along, concerning her. These were things which he would never know. He was only certain, facing familiar gray-green eyes, hearing the low, familiar voice, of the moment's revelation.

"Oh, Evvy," she was saying. "It's just years and years since I've seen you——"

The gong summoned them a second time, more insistently, from the hall below.

II

After dinner there was a dance, for the purpose of which rugs had been rolled aside from the parquet floors of twin drawing rooms; and a trio of Africans resplendent in dinner coats and starched bosoms, appeared in a battered Ford, armed with saxophone and banjo. Cars came winding up the driveway at frequent intervals, bringing hilarious groups from the surrounding countryside. It was all very informal and delightful—especially when Mr. Van Cuyler, a portly bachelor who was in the habit of proclaiming himself unfortunate with the fair sex because all his cooks and best girls got married, kissed the widow hostess after a short struggle under the mistletoe. There was a punch bowl of cut-glass installed in the dining room, the contents of which was, throughout the evening, a subject of much profound speculation and experiment; it was never quite deserted. . . .

Everett, in the stag-line, looked in vain for Margaret and then learned that she was playing bridge, but was reassured by his hostess that she would dance later. It rather startled him when she added, out of a clear sky:

"Of course we know that you won't be really happy till she comes in."

How much more these people discerned than one believed!

He danced amiably with every girl in the room.

It was pleasant, he concluded, to be back again amongst the old crowd after all these months. No one had changed. There was Edith Way, across the room, manipulating violet eyes in the same seductive way; giving departing partners a subtle pressure of the hand that meant "come back soon"; causing havoc among the more inexperienced of the stag-line. Ella Cloyne, too, whose avoirdupois rendered her version of the latest "toddle" none too graceful, who was paraded at frequent intervals before the stag-line by perspiring youths seeking relief. Ella never seemed to mind, though.

Waltzes were played now and again, to the usual protests of the younger element and to the delectation of the hostess and the rotund bachelor, who whirled her about the room in a reckless progress that swept the more fragile males and their partners to the very walls.

The world went on seeking its amusement year after year; if you were happy and amusing yourself there was always room for you. If not——

About ten o'clock he strolled out of the room, lighted a cigarette, and walked slowly up and down the glass-enclosed verandah of the house. Beyond the row of straw-colored curtains drawn tightly across French windows dancing figures flitted, grotesquely attenuated. The blare of the negro trio came eddying out into the darkness, filling it with a syncopated, vibrating appeal. Singing voices, abandoned with the joy of light and warmth and music:

. . . *So keep on loo-king for a blue bird
And list'ning for his song,
Whenever A-pril showers come along.*

He sat down and stared thoughtfully out into the snowy spaces of the night. Then, through a door that led to the dance rooms, Margaret appeared with a man whose face was obscure in the dim half-light. Hal Jones's voice reached his ears.

"What makes you so different tonight, Margaret?"

The blasted fool! The dancing puppet! A symbol of modernity without any of its greatness. Always present, to shatter dreams; to break up illusions. Everett turned quickly in his chair to watch him. The very way he propelled Margaret along the verandah, one sleek hand at her bare elbow, irritated him; his suave voice, too. Why was it that a man's conceit was nearly always in inverse ratio to his worth?

They reached the end of the verandah, turned and came toward him, conversing in low tones. They passed under a cluster of lights and, at that instant, as her eyes met his, all the misgivings of his heart were suddenly swept away; only his brain, cool and calculating, dared not wholly believe.

Mrs. Glamorgan's voice came shrilly from within.

"Oh, Hal Jones! Come in a moment, will you? I want you to help me arrange these little supper favors—you're so clever at things like that."

Hal Jones excused himself from Margaret hurriedly; she did not, it appeared, want to return to the dance just yet.

Everett rose from his chair and joined her. They walked down the verandah, making polite conversation; at the end, gazed down the marble-white slope of a hill toward a lake that gleamed like a frozen mirror under the pallid blueness of the moon.

"We've been skating all day," Margaret was saying; "it was wonderful. . . ."

He did not hear her. His eyes, roving, had discovered not fifty yards from the door of the house the beginning of a toboggan slide, near it a deserted toboggan; a pile of fur coats thrown indiscriminately on a table beside the verandah door. Suddenly he threw a coat about her slender shoulders, captured her hand, and led her out into the still coldness of the night.

"Crazy!" she murmured, laughing.

"Nothing matters tonight," he told her, exulting, "nothing at all!"

In a spirit of humorous resignation she allowed herself to be tucked in rugs upon the toboggan. He leaped on behind; hatless and elated.

Down the hill they went. Singing wind; keen winter wind. Round white moon and sapphire sky. Silver lake, cupped in the white hills, silent and desolate in glacial beauty. Faster and faster. . . . The very essence of flight, that

brought your heart to your mouth in a moment of captured joy. . . .

Across the mirrored ice in the headlong sweep of some winged creature. And, at last, a halt in the still shadows under bare elms delicately etched across the face of the moon. A deathless silence, filled to the brim with the spirit of the night's pure, unreal beauty.

She made an indecisive little movement.

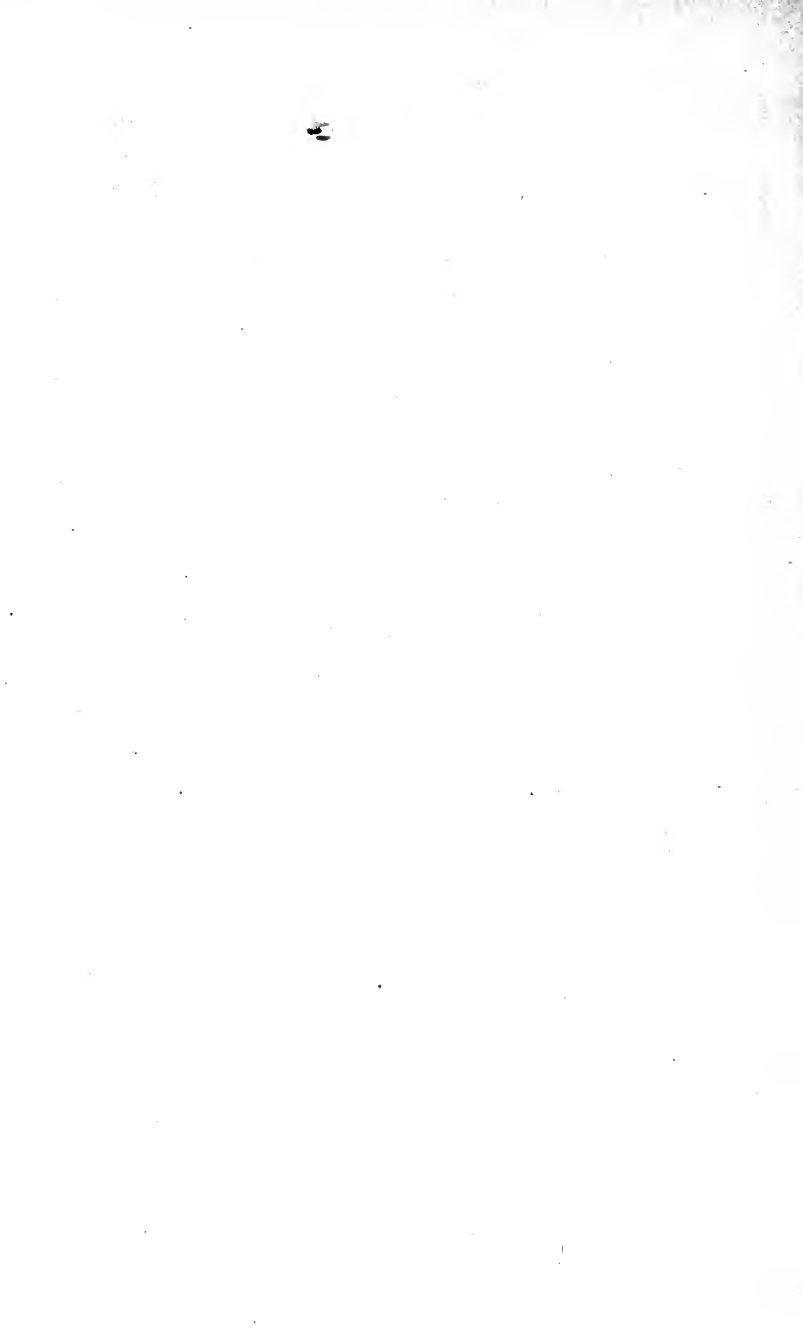
"Don't move—just yet. I've got something—to say."

His voice trembled a little.

She turned her head; eyes met his. Conviction came to him then. There was, he realized with a glorious certainty, no need for such poor, inadequate things as words.

Cool lips rested on his in an ecstasy of contentment. All at once he knew he had just discovered how measureless a privilege it was merely to be alive and young. . . .

THE END



The Man in the Twilight

By
Ridgwell Cullum

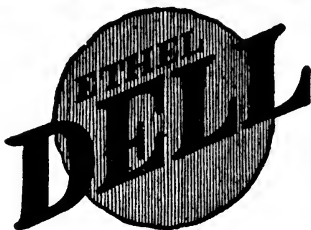
The setting of this story is laid in the northern forests, in a country the author knows well. Its plot is as intricate as he is accustomed to weave, and is worked out among the toilers in two great pulp industries, with the hero in one camp and the heroine in the rival one—and the figure of the man in the twilight casting a strange and weird influence over the chief actors.

“It is vital, highly strung, full of fire and vim and zest. It is a go-ahead in fiction, in truth, with plenty of hustle in it. Few recent novels have such a grip, so much of earnestness, mixed with that deliciously quaint, startling humor which is so characteristic of American life and literature. It is a book that must be read.”—*Freeman's Journal*.

G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York

London



*The Novelist
who never had
a Failure!*

All other novelists, no
matter what their
fame, have slumped—
never, Dell. It is a
perfect staircase
up to Fame, an
astounding cres-
cendo, from
"The Way of
an Eagle" up
to this new
one

- 16 | Charles Rex
- 15 | The Odds
- 14 | The Obstacle Race
- 13 | Rosa Mundi
- 12 | The Top of the World
- 11 | The Tidal Wave
- 10 | The Lamp in the Desert
- 9 | Greatheart
- 8 | The Safety Curtain
- 7 | The Hundredth Chance
- 6 | Bars of Iron
- 5 | The Keeper of the Door
- 4 | The Swindler
- 3 | The Rocks of Valpré
- 2 | The Knave of Diamonds
- 1 | The Way of an Eagle

Charles Rex



YB 40045

M41886

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

